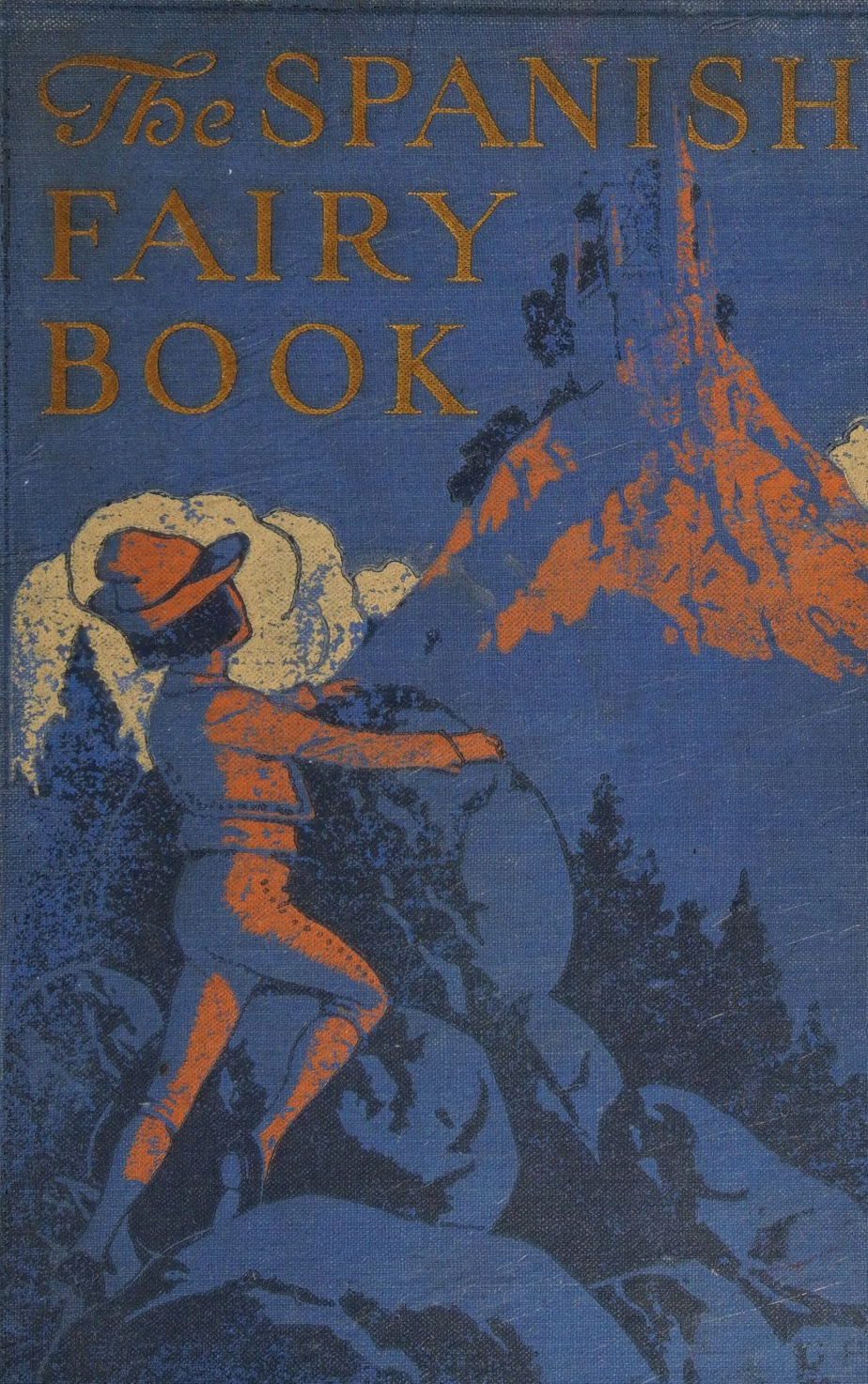
The SPANISH FAIRY BOOK



THE SPANISH FAIRY BOOK

BOOKS IN THE "FAIRY SERIES"

The English Fairy Book
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"AT THAT MOMENT A BEAUTIFUL LADY APPEARED"—*Page* 256

THE SPANISH FAIRY BOOK

(CUENTOS DE HADAS)

BY

GERTRUDIS SEGOVIA

TRANSLATED BY

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WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY GEORGE W. HOOD

NEW YORK
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TO

NATALIA, ELENA, AND GONZALO

FOR WHOM THE STORIES WERE WRITTEN

AND TO

RUTH, ELISABETH, AND DAVIS

FOR WHOM THEY WERE TRANSLATED

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I

THE BLUE LAKE

I

BLACK MAGIC

THE Castle of Floridel and the Palace of Pombal stood front to front, separated only by the marvelous Blue Lake. There were many strange things about this lake. One was that the shore on which the castle stood was beautiful with a wealth of fragrant flowers and lofty trees, while the opposite shore was nothing but a waste of pebbles and briars, with an abrupt cliff rising from the water's edge and on the top of that the palace standing among rocks and thistles.

But if there was a great difference between the flowery garden of the castle and the cold hard rocks of the palace, there was even a greater difference between the inhabitants of those two places.

In the palace the Marquis of Pombal had lived; but he and his wife had died, leaving two small children, Carlos and Natalia. Immediately after the death of the Marquis, his uncle had come to the palace to take charge of the children; but when the little ones saw him, poor Natalia went into a spasm of fright at the horrible ugliness of the old man. His beaked nose was enormous and of a purple-

blue color; its tip came down to meet a sharply pointed chin, and, between the two, spreading from ear to ear, was an open, toothless mouth. This creature's name was Rudizo; and, judging from the things that were told of him, his heart was even more ugly than his face. Many people declared that he had spent his whole life in studying the magic arts, especially those of witchcraft and enchantment, and that his godmother, a cruel witch herself, had taught him all the secrets of her own black magic.

A few months after Rudizo came to live at the palace, the two children disappeared. No one knew what became of them. One man at last found courage enough to ask the terrible Rudizo.

"They are where they are!" the ugly old man growled; and frowned so threateningly that the poor fellow quickly changed the subject.

Every one thought that Rudizo had made away with the children so that he might have the palace and all its wealth; but not a soul dared speak his thoughts, for all lips were sealed with fear.

Rudizo's servants detested him, and trembled whenever he came near them; but they were afraid to leave the palace, for they knew that some awful punishment would surely befall them. Black magic can be worked even at a distance.

If, however, in this terrible Palace of Pombal all was dreary and mournful, in the neighboring castle

across the Blue Lake only happiness dwelt. Its owners, the Count and Countess of Floridel, lived there with their four sons, Augusto, Enrique, Federico, and Aurelio, and their little daughter, Starlita. All five of the children were beautiful and good; although the three older boys were somewhat spoiled, because they had not always been corrected when they were younger.

Augusto was seventeen. His one fault was a very strong curiosity.

Enrique, sixteen, was so accustomed to telling things that were not true that nobody ever believed a word he said.

Federico had just passed his fifteenth birthday; and he, poor boy, was so gluttonous that whenever anything good to eat was left within his reach it disappeared very rapidly.

Aurelio, fourteen years old, was endowed with all the virtues, including a beautiful disposition. His health was delicate, however, and he was not able to join his brothers in their play.

Starlita was thirteen, and was as beautiful and as good as could be. She adored Aurelio, who was her favorite of all her brothers.

In the Castle of Floridel, as the dinner hour approached, there was great excitement among the children. They were expecting a guest. That was not unusual, of course; but this particular guest was none other than the wicked magician, Rudizo. The

day before, he had announced that he would visit them—merely a neighborly call. The Countess Blanca received his announcement with dread; but courtesy, she felt, demanded that she invite him to dinner; and he had accepted with surprising promptness.

Rudizo came to the dinner, and made himself very agreeable; but when he returned to his palace that night he was more wicked and ugly than ever. The contrast between his miserable life and the happiness that overflowed the Castle of Floridel awakened all the worst that was in him and made him furiously envious. Till far into the night he sat brooding and planning.

Shortly after this the Count of Floridel was invited by Rudizo to join a hunting party in the mountains. The Countess, frightened by a feeling that something dreadful would happen to him, begged him not to go; but he only laughed at her anxiety, kissing her and showing her how impossible it was for him to refuse the invitation. And he promised to return that very same night.

Night arrived; but the unfortunate Countess waited in vain for her husband.

The next morning Rudizo came over and, pretending deep sorrow, told the poor Countess that in the midst of the hunting a lion had thrown himself upon the Count and torn him to pieces, in spite of all Rudizo's efforts to save him.

The whole castle was in tears. Countess Blanca's only consolation was in the love of her children and the affectionate care of Brunilda, her fairy godmother, who flew to her at once when she heard the distressing news.

Just at this time a weird thing began to terrorize the neighborhood: every night a beautiful lion came down from the high cliffs of Pombal, crossed the lake to the other side, and roared mournfully in front of the lattice gate of the garden of Floridel; then, without attacking any one, he returned to his rocky lair on the summit of Pombal.

The water of this strange Blue Lake showed a peculiar condition. Near the shores of Floridel it was smooth and tranquil, and so clear that one could see the bottom of the lake, pebbled with sands of gold; but near the shores of Pombal gigantic waves lifted themselves and beat against the rocks and cliffs, and the water there lost its clearness. The depth of the lake was so great that it could not be seen where the two united. No boat ever could venture near the cliffs of Pombal, for it meant sure death. For that reason a stone bridge had been built across the lake to connect the two castles.

And it was across this stone bridge that the beautiful lion came every night.

II

THE ENCHANTMENT

TWELVE months had passed since the Count disappeared; and every day, under the pretext of consoling the Countess Blanca, the wicked Rudizo had visited the castle. Blanca always received him, fearing that if she refused to do so he would take some revenge that would harm her children.

One afternoon, when the four boys had gone for a walk with Brunilda, the Countess and little Starlita sat on one of the balconies of the castle overlooking the lake.

Rudizo was announced; and he entered with what he thought was a pleasant smile but what in reality was a most terrifying grimace.

"Countess," he said, seating himself on the balcony beside her, "it has now been a year since your great misfortune, and it is time for me to speak of what is in my heart. I love you; you need a husband to help you look after your large fortune and to educate your boys; I will be to them the father that they need to guide them at this young age. I have come to offer you my hand."

Poor Blanca was horrified. For a few moments she could not speak; then she answered him in a trembling voice:

"I thank you for your friendship; but more than that I cannot accept. Never will I forget my noble husband!"

"You mean that you refuse?" Rudizo asked, astonished.

"I refuse."

"Aren't you afraid of the magic power which people say I have? Don't you think you are *obliged* to accept me?"

"Nothing, nobody, in the world can force me to forget the dear husband whom I have lost through you—you wicked sorcerer!"

"Ah-h!" Rudizo made a frightful grimace. "A sorcerer you dare to call me! Very well; I will show you my power."

Giving a leap, before Blanca could stop him, he grabbed Starlita with both hands and, lifting her with the mighty force of his arms, threw her far out into the lake, at the same time mumbling rapidly:

"O Lake whose waters are so blue,
With deepest rage I throw to you
This child who instantly shall be
A little mermaid of the sea."

The transformation was immediate. Scarcely had the sorcerer uttered the last word when the unfortunate Starlita was converted into a mermaid and, singing a song of the sirens, disappeared beneath the water.

The poor mother was mad with fury and grief. With her fists clenched she rushed at Rudizo, screaming:

"Give me back my daughter, you vile assassin! Leave this house immediately, miserable witch, and never dare to come back!"

Rudizo caught each of Blanca's fists in his powerful hands and, holding her thus, he began to smile. Slowly his lips spread from ear to ear, hideously, showing the toothless gums within.

"Your insults are now going to bring upon you new punishment," he said.

Then, pushing Blanca back on to the seat from which she had risen, he drew from one of his pockets a thistle, whose flower, stem, and leaves were of pure gold.

"This," Rudizo explained, still with his horrible grimace, "is the only thing that can turn Starlita back into a human being. It is the talisman against my magic. And now, so that you may lose all hope, just watch what I do!"

With the full force of his powerful arm, he flung the thistle out into the middle of the lake and it sank to the bottom.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Look now for somebody to return your daughter to you! And with her the thistle of gold, for only by its touch can she regain her natural form. No one but myself can make the magic thistle work; and I will do it the day that

you come to the Palace of Pombal and, on your knees, beg me to be your husband!''

With a furious gesture, Rudizo turned toward the door, slammed it shut after him, and went striding out of the castle, across the stone bridge, and up the rocky cliffs to his palace.

When Brunilda and the four boys returned to the castle an hour later they found the Countess lying on the floor of the balcony in a dead faint. It took them quite a long time to revive her; and then only in between many cries of grief could she tell them what had happened. The boys were heartbroken, for they adored their little sister.

Brunilda alone had remained calm.

''Do not grieve!'' she begged. ''Remember that I also am a magician. Your loss, even though very great, may not be beyond remedy. If I cannot undo the enchantment of Rudizo, because his power is greater than mine, my cousin, Fairy Kindheart, surely will be able to help us. At this time of the year she lives in her castle about twenty leagues from here. I will go at once to see her.''

From a tall flower-urn which stood in one corner of the balcony, Brunilda plucked a brilliant crimson rose, and held it up a minute so that its petals caught the sunlight. With a light kiss, she dropped it over the balcony; and the instant the rose touched the ground it was transformed into a beautiful little red coach. The Fairy clapped her hands, and six rab-

bits appeared, all ready with harness of silver and pearl, and in a twinkling they were hooked to the tiny coach. Brunilda flew down, and a moment later the coach was out of sight.

There was some consolation in the promises of the Fairy, and Blanca and the boys waited as patiently as they could for her return.

At precisely midnight her coach stopped before the castle, and the instant Brunilda alighted, it disappeared as though it had never been.

"I bring you good news!" she exclaimed, embracing the weeping Blanca. "My cousin, Fairy Kindheart, far more powerful than the sorcerer Rudizo, promises us her help. One of you children will be given the great joy of rescuing Starlita. That is, if—"

Brunilda stopped and looked at each boy in turn.

"The way will be full of dangers," she said. "Only very great bravery and a staunch heart will succeed. And if you all fail, poor Starlita will be lost forever. Are you willing to face all these dangers?"

The four boys shouted, "Yes!" with much enthusiasm.

The three older ones turned to Aurelio.

"How can a weak little fellow like you compete with us, who are so strong and healthy?" they asked.

"Sometimes willingness and intelligence accom-

plish more than strength," Brunilda answered them. Then, turning to the youngest, she added: "You do well, Aurelio, in wanting to save Starlita."

The boys climbed about the lovely Fairy, begging her to tell them just what would have to be done to bring Starlita back to them.

"My cousin will tell you," she said. "First of all, you have to go to the Castle of the Seven Towers, where Fairy Kindheart lives. The castle is surrounded by a very high wall; but do not let that discourage you; for in one side there is a small silver door which leads into the garden. This door is shut to all the world, but I have here something that will open it easily for you."

To each of the boys she gave a silver star, which they hastened to pin securely to their coats.

"I may tell you," Brunilda continued, "that you cannot break the enchantment of your sister without first securing a magic suit which Fairy Kindheart will give to the one that she thinks deserves it. If you have on this magic suit, you can live under water just as if you were a fish; or you can go through fire without being scorched. In order to win this suit, you will first have to prove that you are worthy of it."

"We are ready to fight against any obstacle!" the four exclaimed together. "There can be no danger so great that we will give up our desire to save our sister!"

"Ah, my children! Fairy Kindheart is as severe as she is good; and perhaps it is not your valor that she intends to prove. Be careful of what you do. Remember, Augusto, that curiosity of yours! And you, Enrique, be sure to tell the truth! And you, Federico, learn to control your appetite!

"Now that I have put you on your guard, we will all go to bed. To-morrow morning early, Augusto must start for the Castle of the Seven Towers. Let us hope that he may return triumphant. If, unfortunately, he should fail to get the magic suit, then Enrique must try; and then Federico. As you are the youngest, Aurelio, you must wait till the last.

"I forgot to tell you that if any boy is thrown out through that silver door, he will never be able to enter Fairy Kindheart's castle again."

III

THE CASTLE OF THE SEVEN TOWERS

WHEN the first rays of the sun streaked the sky at dawn, Augusto jumped upon his handsome sorrel horse, eager to be off over the twenty leagues that stretched between the two castles.

At noon precisely he arrived at the little silver door. An old man sat guarding it; but when

Augusto had given him the silver star the door opened, and he lost no time in passing through.

For a moment Augusto was dazed by the magnificence of the garden. Flowers were blooming everywhere, each one seeming to be more gorgeous than its neighbor; and above them all floated a fragrance that was intoxicating. Birds chirped and sang and warbled; a silver fountain trickled with fairy music among glistening diamonds and emeralds and rubies. In the center of all this exquisiteness rose the castle of Fairy Kindheart. And in one corner of the garden stood a closed pavilion, its walls covered with ivy and honeysuckle.

Augusto started toward the broad steps of the castle, and there he met the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Apparently she was just starting on a journey, for she was seated on a large white ostrich which had strapped to its back an elegant saddle-chair of red velvet, embroidered with pearls and rubies.

Fairy Kindheart called to Augusto affectionately.

"I know who you are and what you wish," she said; "and I want to help you. At this moment, though, a matter of the greatest importance obliges me to leave the castle. I will return in a few hours, and we will then talk about Starlita. In the meantime you may walk around the garden, wherever you wish. The only place you must not go is the little pavilion in the corner. Remember, if you should

look into that pavilion you would cause me very great pain. But I am sure you would not do that to one who wants to help you."

With that, the Fairy was gone, and Augusto walked up and down the garden and around the castle. He wanted very much to know what was in that pavilion; but, so that he would not be tempted, he kept as far as possible away from it. Finally, when he became tired of walking, he stopped to rest on a bench among the flowers. As he sat inhaling the perfume of the blossoms about him, there came to his ears the sweetest, elfin music. He jumped up and began to look about for the person who could play so delightfully; unconsciously he walked in the direction of the sweet sounds; and then, before he knew it, he found himself in front of the little pavilion. Yes, the music was inside; and it was now sweeter and more entrancing than ever.

Augusto's first impulse was to run away, as far and as fast as he could; but then came that curiosity of his, and he thought to himself:

"What harm will it do if I look just to see what is going on in there? Surely none. Perhaps Fairy Kindheart means it for a surprise for me when she comes back; but I can pretend that I have not seen it."

Being entirely mastered now by that bad fellow called Curiosity, Augusto could no longer resist.

"IN THE CENTER OF ALL THIS EXQUISITENESS ROSE THE CASTLE OF FAIRY KINDHEART"

He pushed on the door, and it opened at once; and at that instant the music ceased.

Within the pavilion everything was in total darkness. Augusto stepped forward. But there was no floor. Too late to jump backward, he fell through the darkness to the bottom of a deep well; and there he lay suffering great pain from his bruises. He screamed for help; but nobody could hear him. During the long hours that he lay there, groaning and crying, you may be sure that he thought a good deal about old Curiosity and all the trouble he brings.

Even though not a ray of light filtered through into the utter darkness of the well, Augusto was able to tell, by the many hours he had passed, that night had come and gone and it was another day. In the faint hope of getting some help, he began again to shout.

Then a brilliant light flooded the floor of the well, and the Fairy appeared, with an angry look on her face.

"So! You have fallen under the first proof, and will be thrown out of my castle. Don't think that curiosity is a small fault; for it causes many others. You see how it has made you ungrateful!"

Augusto, confused and grieved, fell on his knees at the feet of the Fairy and begged her forgiveness.

But, as Brunilda had said, the Fairy was as severe

as she was good. From one of her bracelets hung a small bell covered with precious stones. She rang this, and immediately two enormous negroes appeared and, lifting Augusto in their giant arms, crossed the garden, and flung him out of the little door. Thus he was forever shut out of the Castle of the Seven Towers.

Still suffering from the bruises he got when he fell to the bottom of the well, he had to walk all of the twenty long leagues back to his castle. That was bad enough; but the worst was to have to confess that, all because of his one fault, he had failed.

Ashamed and repentant, the poor boy at last reached Floridel and flung himself into the arms of the unhappy Countess.

IV

THE PRINCE OF THE BATUECAS

THE following morning, Enrique, filled with hope and good resolutions, undertook the journey to the Castle of the Seven Towers.

Near the little silver door he jumped off his horse and told the servant who had accompanied him that he need not wait. But the faithful servant, remembering what had happened to Augusto, begged to remain.

"I will not need you," Enrique said. "Take my horse back to its stable. The Fairy will lend me a mount when I am ready to return."

The servant was an obedient fellow, and he started back for Floridel just as Enrique gave his silver star to the old man at the door and passed through into the garden.

Like Augusto, he was dazed for a moment by the magnificence about him. While he stood near a giant rose-bush, covered with exquisite blossoms, he heard a sweet voice somewhere behind him. It was saying:

"I tell you, Gloria, it is the Prince of the Batuecas that Fairy Kindheart is expecting!"

"No, Wildrose; you are mistaken. I have heard that the Prince is extremely handsome and brave. This fellow does not appear to be so elegant."

"Where are your eyes, Gloria? It can be no other than the handsome Prince."

"Well, we will look at him closer and make certain—"

The demon of vanity took possession of Enrique on hearing these words; and so, quite forgetting his promises, when the two maidens appeared in the path and asked him if he were the Prince, he answered without hesitating:

"Yes; I am the Prince of the Batuecas. I have left the splendors of the court of my father to visit Fairy Kindheart."

Enrique said this very grandly, and drew himself up, with his chest thrown out, so that he would look as much like a Prince as possible.

"We have heard, sir, that your kingdom is very wonderful," Wildrose said timidly.

"It is marvelous!" declared Enrique. "Why, we have trees that grow precious stones; the streets are paved with gold; the fountains give milk and wine instead of water—"

Telling his astonished hearers lie after lie, he at last arrived at the castle, where Gloria, running ahead, had announced his coming.

Fairy Kindheart came forward to receive him; but she looked so serious and so severe that Enrique thought to himself: "What an unsuitable name she has!"

"Who are you?" Fairy Kindheart asked.

For a moment he was tempted to confess that he was not the Prince; but the two lovely maidens were standing there, and he did not want to appear ridiculous.

"I am the Prince of the Batuecas," he said.

"Very well; take a seat."

Enrique thought that was a very strange way to receive any one so exalted as a Prince; but he sat in the chair which Wildrose indicated.

Fairy Kindheart rang the little jeweled bell which hung from her bracelet, and a moment later there appeared at the door an extremely ugly man who

was so tall and so thin that he twisted himself almost into a knot to get into the room. He wore enormous spectacles, and carried under his arm a large book and in his hand a stout switch.

"Dr. Adormidera," Fairy Kindheart said, indicating Enrique, "here is your pupil, the Prince of the Batuecas. You know that his good parents, the King and Queen, my dear friends, could not make him study. So they have sent him to me, to cure him of his laziness. Knowing your great ability in teaching, I have sent for you. Stay here with him; and, above all, *make* him study. His mother says you may punish him as often as necessary, and in any way that is necessary. I leave him to you, now. *Make him study!*"

Fairy Kindheart and the two maidens left the room and closed the door. Poor Enrique crouched in his chair, terrified. Instead of the great honors which he expected to receive as the handsome and brave Prince of the Batuecas, there awaited him nothing but study and punishment.

Dr. Adormidera came over to him slowly; then took him roughly by the shoulder and pushed him toward a door that led into a little anteroom. There he gave him the big book which he had carried under his arm; and, opening it, pointed to a long lesson, telling Enrique that he would be shut into the anteroom while he learned it.

"Prince," the tall, ugly professor said sternly

before leaving him, "you shall neither eat nor leave this room until you know perfectly every word on every one of these pages."

Enrique repented, even though late, of his bad habit of telling lies; but, seeing no way out of it now but to pitch in and study the long lesson which Dr. Adormidera had given him, he took up the book with a sigh.

Oh! Impossible! It was written in the language of the Batuecas, of which he knew not one single word!

Three times the bony professor came to ask him if he knew the lesson; and three times his answer was, "Not yet!"

As time passed he began to get hungry, and more hungry; but night arrived, and still they had given him nothing to eat. At midnight he heard Fairy Kindheart's voice, and his hopes arose. At last he was to have some supper! But when the door opened and Fairy Kindheart and the professor stood there, the Fairy looked so indignant that Enrique knew it meant still more punishment for the Prince of the Batuecas. Then, tired, hungry, really repentant, he confessed, sobbing and begging forgiveness.

"Do not think you have deceived me," the angry Fairy said. "I merely wished to prove you through and through; and, as a fault never goes alone, you have united vanity and pride with duplicity and

lying. Dr. Adormidera," turning to the professor, "punish him as he deserves!"

The wise Dr. Adormidera lost no time in obeying. He raised the big switch which he carried in his hand and brought it down on the head of the unfortunate Enrique. Enrique, mad with terror and pain, flew toward the garden. Adormidera followed, now hitting him, now hitting the air. Enrique reached the silver door and jumped through it as Adormidera gave him the final, stinging blow.

The remainder of the night poor Enrique spent in a field, nearly dead from fright and from the pains on his head and shoulders caused by Dr. Adormidera's heavy switch. Two days later, worn out and disheartened, he crept into Floridel, promising never, never to tell another lie so long as he lived.

V

THE ENORMOUS CAKE

VERY enthusiastic indeed was Federico when he reached the Castle of the Seven Towers; and, as confident as his brothers had been that he would surely win the magic suit, he sent back the servant who had accompanied him.

After giving his silver star to the old man, he passed joyously through the little door into the garden.

In front of the broad steps which led up to the castle there stretched a network of roses; and over that was placed a large sign:

DO NOT GO BEYOND THESE FLOWERS

Federico sat down beside the silver fountain, to eat the food he had brought with him; and there he waited for two hours, without showing any signs of impatience. Then the beautiful Fairy suddenly appeared with a smile of welcome.

"Splendid, Federico!" she said sweetly. "You are patient, and obedient, and have passed my proof triumphantly. Pardon me for leaving you now; I have just been asked to be the godmother of a little son of the King, who is my dearest friend. I must go; but I shall not be long in returning. You may walk wherever you wish, in the garden or in the castle; and have your supper whenever you get hungry. Do not wait for me; I have ordered them to serve your supper at the usual hour—unless you want it sooner."

Federico, overwhelmed with happiness at having passed the Fairy's proof, began to picture himself strutting into the Castle of Floridel, wearing the miraculous suit. He walked about the garden, more pleased with himself and the world at every step. Here and there he stopped to gather some choice flower to take back to his mother, knowing that Fairy Kindheart would not object; for, when he

broke off a blossom, another one even more beautiful instantly appeared in its place. When at last it grew dark, Federico climbed the broad steps and entered the castle.

Six white kittens, dressed in the proper style for waiters, with cutaway coats and white shirt-fronts, announced that supper was served. As Federico knew that in the castle of a fairy everything is marvelous, he was not astonished to hear the kittens speak.

The very first thing that attracted his attention on entering the dining-hall was an enormous cake, covered over with white icing and dotted thickly with candied cherries—his favorite sweetmeat!

"This good Fairy has not forgotten a single detail!" thought Federico happily; and his mouth watered as he glanced at the delicious cherries.

He sat down at the table and ate with an excellent appetite everything that was put before him, counting the minutes until the time should arrive for the cake to be served. The kittens brought in one delicacy after the other; but nothing, nothing could equal that cherry cake. At last, not being able to wait a minute longer, Federico called one of the kittens and asked that it be served.

The kitten gave a mournful mew.

"I am very sorry that I cannot oblige you, sir," he said. "Fairy Kindheart has forbidden us to serve that."

"Oh, you're mistaken," Federico insisted. "You did not understand what she said."

"Convince yourself, sir, by your own eyes."

Federico looked up and then saw a card attached to the giant cake. It read:

PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH THIS CAKE

Federico left the table somewhat out of humor. The kittens, after clearing away the dishes, brought some books and photographs to help him pass the time while he waited for the return of the Fairy. Federico intended to read, to look at the pictures; but it was impossible. He could fix his attention on nothing but that delicious looking cake. Without realizing what he was doing, he walked over to it, so that he might see it the better.

"It has so *many* cherries," he thought, "that if I took one—only one—nobody would ever know it."

He reached his hand out slowly, and held it over the cake while he looked all around the room, to be sure the kittens were not there. Then he quickly plucked out a big, rosy cherry.

A frightful thunderclap sounded through the room; the top of the cake flew off; and out of its center stepped a hideous dwarf, mounted on a broomstick.

Federico screamed; but the Dwarf grabbed him, threw him onto the broomstick, and flew out of the window, beating him soundly as they went.

"For gluttony! . . . For disobedience! . . . Take that! . . . And that! . . ." The Dwarf's cries rang with the blows.

After many hours, which seemed years to poor, sore Federico, the Dwarf flew down to the earth, and immediately disappeared.

Federico found himself near Floridel. Great was his humiliation to have to present himself to his mother and confess to her that he had not controlled his appetite. He found her crying bitterly. Little by little she had lost all hope of ever seeing her daughter disenchanted.

"Do not cry, dear Mother!" begged Aurelio, embracing her. "Last night Brunilda gave me a magic drink, and I am as strong now as my brothers. What has happened to them will show me what to avoid. I shall return soon—very, very soon I shall return, triumphant, to your arms!"

VI

THE MAGIC SUIT

VERY early the following morning Aurelio set forth; and a few hours afterward he pulled up his fiery colt in front of the little door to the Castle of the Seven Towers. He gave his silver star to the old man, and immediately was permitted to enter.

Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps when he saw coming toward him the wonderful Fairy Kindheart, followed by all her court, in fantastic dress.

"I expected you," the Fairy said, as she drew near to him. "But I am afraid, Aurelio, if you are like your brothers, poor little Starlita will remain enchanted forever."

"Dear Fairy," Aurelio answered, with a low bow, "my brothers are not really bad; and now, thanks to your severe lessons, they have been corrected of their faults. They grieve with all their hearts for having failed you."

"And you, being the youngest and smallest, hope to succeed where they have failed?"

"Oh, but my case is not the same. They have always lived happily, with nothing in the world to cross their slightest desire; therefore they knew nothing of self-control. Until yesterday I was a delicate and sickly child. Many things I wanted, but could not have because of my poor health. I could not join my brothers' plays; I could not do many things I wished very much to do. Through it all I have learned control."

"You speak like a man," the Fairy said. "We will see whether your acts correspond with your words."

The conversation was interrupted by loud thunder-peals that came crashing about their ears. *Boom! Boom-m-m-m-m!* The Fairy, pretending

great anxiety, caught Aurelio by the hand and pushed him hurriedly into a clump of bushes near where they were standing.

"Don't move from here!" she whispered. "I forbid it! And don't turn your head, no matter what you may hear. Don't *move* until I come back to get you."

When the Fairy disappeared, the thunder grew more terrific; and to it was united the sound of loud voices and disagreeable accents that, little by little, were drawing nearer the place where Aurelio was hidden. The branches about him began to move, slowly, cautiously, and then something brushed his shoulder. But he stood immovable, as the Fairy had ordered him. Five minutes passed; he felt something furry crawl slowly up the back of his neck. He clenched his hands but did not stir. Another five minutes: something clawed at his shoulder. Still he did not move. And all the time there were frightful screams and groans, now behind him, now to this side, now to that. And above all the noises the crashing thunder-peals.

At the end of an hour, the garden once more was quiet; and Fairy Kindheart came running toward Aurelio with a smiling face.

"You make me very happy," she said. "I see that you can control your curiosity. Your obedience will be rewarded."

They entered the castle together; and a few mo-

ments later the six white kittens appeared and announced that dinner was served.

How happy Aurelio was to see on a side-table a large, sweet ham—his favorite dish!

They had scarcely seated themselves at the table when there appeared a small black rabbit, carrying on a silver platter a letter for Fairy Kindheart.

"How unfortunate!" the Fairy exclaimed, when she had read the letter. "I am called away on a very urgent matter. I may not be long; but do not wait for me. The kittens will serve you. Eat anything you want—anything but the ham on the side-table; that you must not touch."

Aurelio felt greatly disappointed; but he was so accustomed, because of his ill health, to having to do without things which he most wanted, that now he was only happy to have in front of him so much that he *could* eat! But—he had taken only one mouthful when all the food disappeared, leaving him even more hungry than he had been when he sat down to the table. What was most provoking was that the delicious ham remained on the little side-table, and he could get whiffs of its fragrance.

Aurelio got up from the table, very, very slowly; stood a moment looking at the tempting ham; then walked over and took a chair as far as possible away from it. There he sat for four hours, waiting for the Fairy.

She arrived a few minutes before midnight, and with a sweet smile embraced Aurelio.

"I am convinced that your acts are as brave as your words," she said. "And I believe you are going to win in the fight to save Starlita. In order to overcome others, you must first of all triumph over yourself; and you have proved that you can do this."

She smiled as she clapped her hands for the white kittens.

"We will dine now," she added. "I know that you are very hungry."

The first thing that Fairy Kindheart put on his plate was a big slice of that exquisite ham; and she told him that he might have as much more as he wanted.

When the meal was finished, she showed him to his room.

"My joy will be very great," she declared, "if in a short time I can give you that magic suit. Now, good-night, dear boy. Oh, I forgot to tell you that you are not to leave this room until I come for you. Good-night!"

Aurelio woke very early the following morning. He bathed, dressed with great care, and while he waited until he should be called by the Fairy he heard an unknown voice in the room next to his.

"Fairy Queen," it was saying, "here is the magic

suit which you told me to get out. It really seems to me, though, that the boy is not old enough to use it."

"But, Gloria," answered the voice of Fairy Kindheart, "you know that after a boy reaches sixteen he can wear it; and Aurelio is sixteen, I'm sure. We will go ask him."

Aurelio had not lost a single word of this conversation; and very great indeed was his pain at hearing it. All of the Fairy's proofs that he had passed through so safely would come to nothing! For he was only fifteen!

"If I tell her I am sixteen," he thought, "I will get the magic suit. And, after all, it would be almost the truth, for I will be sixteen soon."

His conscience, trying to overcome the temptation, argued: "It would be a lie; and, more than that, you would deceive the kind Fairy, who has been so good to you!"

At that moment Fairy Kindheart appeared at the door, greeting him with a smile.

"Come, Aurelio," she said. "I am going to give you the magic suit now. But before I give it to you, tell me: How old are you?"

Hot tears came into Aurelio's eyes, but he blinked them back bravely.

"Fif-teen!" he almost sobbed.

"Embrace me!" cried the delighted Fairy. "The proofs have ended; you have triumphed in the last

one and have won the prize! You have proved that you know how to resist bad temptations."

Aurelio threw himself at the feet of the Fairy, thanking her with a heart overflowing with happiness. Then she helped him to put on the suit, so eagerly desired. It looked no different from the one he took off except that it had, embroidered on one of the cuffs, a silver star resting on a seashell.

"Dear Fairy," Aurelio said, "I shall never know how to express my gratitude. Would you think me bold if I were to ask you another favor?"

"What do you wish?"

"You are so good and wise. Tell me now what I must do to save little Starlita."

"That is a reasonable request," Fairy Kindheart said. "But you need not worry. I am going to give you a traveling companion, who knows all my instructions; and all you need do is to follow his advice."

VII

THE WHITE MOUSE

FAIRY KINDHEART tinkled her jeweled bell, and immediately there appeared a white mouse, dressed in a tiny suit precisely similar to the one Aurelio was wearing.

"Come, Pelotín," said Fairy Kindheart.

The mouse made a deep bow; then, giving a jump, gallantly kissed the hand of the Fairy.

"Pelotín, this is the traveling companion of whom I have told you. You may go now, Aurelio. My greatest wish is that you soon may return to tell me of your victory. The porter has orders to admit you whenever you come."

The little mouse gave a jump and landed on Aurelio's shoulder, and the boy reached up and caressed it fondly.

At the silver door to the castle garden they saw the white ostrich which the Fairy always used for her journeys.

"I have had my mount prepared for you," she smiled, "so that you may quickly reach Floridel, for the Countess is impatient to see you."

Aurelio thanked her again and, holding tightly to Pelotín, climbed upon the ostrich. Within an hour he was at his own castle.

Blanca's joy at seeing Aurelio and hearing of his adventures at the Castle of the Seven Towers is indescribable. Augusto, Enrique, and Federico were as happy as Aurelio at his triumph, and they petted the little mouse, who delighted them with his liveliness and his good manners.

Aurelio did not want to lose a minute; and that same night he started off, guided by Pelotín. In crossing the bridge they met the beautiful lion which, every night at midnight for a whole year,

had roared mournfully beneath the windows of Floridel.

"You need not be afraid of it," Pelotín said.

Aurelio drew near and gently stroked its mane. Then a strange thing happened. From the eyes of the lion two big tears fell to the ground.

For a day and a night Aurelio and Pelotín walked without resting, stopping only long enough to eat the provisions they carried. At the end of that time they arrived at a place where the lake took the form of a gulf, stretching an arm of water up into the meadow.

"Here is where our dangers begin," Pelotín said. "We must arm ourselves with cunning and prudence and valor. Follow me!"

The mouse marched into the lake, whose waves at that place were as salty as those of the sea. Aurelio ran after his little guide, seeing with surprise a narrow staircase which had been hidden by the dark color of the water.

VIII

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE

FOR more than an hour they climbed down, down, down. Then the steps ended abruptly in front of a door of solid gold.

"*Babilabú!*" cried Pelotín, in a high-pitched voice.

Instantly the door opened; closing again almost before the two had scampered inside.

The mouse paused a moment, and then began to sing:

"I come, I come to look for thee;
Present thyself, O dear Mimí.
The time to save thee now is near.
O my Mimí, canst thou not hear?"

Instantly the water moved, and there swam toward them a beautiful little fish, its tail covered with silver scales.

Pelotín, running to her, embraced her with his two forepaws and showered her with kisses.

Aurelio was astonished at this scene; but he waited patiently until the mouse had controlled his emotion.

"Mimí," Pelotín said, "Aurelio and I have come to set you free."

The astonishment of Aurelio now reached its highest point. Who could this fine fish be? Certainly, he did not know her. Prudent always, he decided not to ask any questions.

"We must hold a council now," exclaimed Pelotín, "and decide what we must do next. Did you do what I asked you to, Mimí?"

"Of course. You know that I could not forget. You will need all of your cunning to reach the Coral

Palace, where Starlita is guarded; but we will be able to speak with her."

"My sister!" exclaimed Aurelio. "When shall I see her?"

"To-night. They guard her closely, without letting her leave the coral grove, for fear that she may escape in spite of her mermaid's form. Rudizo has decided to marry Starlita in a year or two; he has told Starlita that if she will promise to marry him he will give her back her human form; but she refuses him and cries, hoping always that some one will come to disenchant her."

The bottom of this lake belonged to Zorro, who was an intimate friend of Rudizo's and was as cruel and wicked as the sorcerer. For this reason, Rudizo left Starlita in his care, going down every afternoon to visit her.

"Yesterday," the little fish said, "when Rudizo and Zorro were leaving the palace they stopped a minute where I was hidden in the seaweed, and I heard what they were saying.

" 'Hurry, Rudizo!' Zorro said. 'The sun is setting, and you must never forget that if the night were to catch you still at the bottom of the lake you would lose your power and would have to remain forever under the water. I should be glad to have you here—but you might not like it.'

" 'Well,' Rudizo replied, 'I should have the comfort of your friendship and the love of Starlita. No-

body knows that the golden thistle, whose touch is necessary for her to recover her human form, was found by you and given into the keeping of the Hydra of the Seven Heads; so if I have to stay here, she will have to stay, too. If I convince her that there is no hope for her return to earth, she will then begin to love me.'

"You see," went on Mimí, "that I have made good use of the time. I have tried to discover some way in which Rudizo would forget to return to the earth at sunset, so that he would be powerless to hinder our escape. Once he has lost his power, it will not be so difficult for us to rob the Hydra of the Seven Heads of the golden thistle. I know where his cave is. The worst of it is that always some of his heads keep awake while the others sleep."

Aurelio and the mouse and Mimí had kept going deeper and deeper into the lake until at last they were so tired that they stopped to rest on some floating seaweed. That night, guided by the little fish, they crept into the coral grove, and then into the palace of Zorro.

What a marvelous palace it was! Its walls of gold and coral, covered with pearls, produced a fantastic effect in the streaks of moonlight which filtered between the waves of the lake.

Mimí had told Starlita to expect them, and she was waiting in the garden, among beautiful coral caves overhung with water-plants. Her joy at seeing

Aurelio may be imagined. Mimí and Pelotín left them together for a little while, and then they came back and told Starlita all that had happened, including the conversation between Zorro and Rudizo.

"It will be necessary," Pelotín said to Starlita, "for you to amuse Rudizo in some way so that he will forget to leave until too late."

They discussed various plans, and decided that they would begin the very next day with the sorcerer.

When Rudizo entered the coral palace that afternoon, Starlita met him with a smile of friendliness that astonished him. She rarely ever would speak to him; and never once had she smiled.

"Dear Rudizo," she said sweetly, "if you would be so very good as to take me for a visit to the north shore of the lake, you would give me the greatest pleasure. I have never been there. I should like to gather some of the exquisite water-lilies that grow near that shore."

Rudizo was delighted. He consented at once. But when they had gathered the lilies and Starlita, even more enthusiastic and more friendly, begged him to go still farther away from the door of gold, through which he must pass to return to the earth, the watchful Zorro came rushing to them, shouting as he swam:

"Quick, Rudizo! Climb upon this dolphin! It is the only way you can reach the staircase before sunset. Quick!"

Rudizo, terrified, jumped upon the dolphin, and was away, without even stopping to say, "Excuse me!"

That night poor Starlita told the others what had happened.

"But I have an idea!" she exclaimed. "I heard Zorro say that to-morrow he has to oversee some plantations of seaweed and sponges very far from here. We will see if I don't have better success with Zorro out of the way!"

The next afternoon Rudizo found Starlita alone in the palace.

"Forgive me," he said then, "for leaving you so hurriedly yesterday. A most urgent matter that I had forgotten demanded that I lose not a minute. Shall we go back to the water-lilies again to-day?"

"You are very kind," Starlita said, smiling sweetly; "but I am tired to-day and would rather remain in the palace. To pass the time, I will tell you some stories, if you would like."

Rudizo's heart was filled with joy. Never could he tire of listening to Starlita's charming voice. The words fell from her lips like tinkling music.

Fascinated, Rudizo lost all count of the hours. Time passed, and Starlita kept on, with one tale after another, not pausing in between.

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and Zorro burst in.

"Rudizo!" he cried, almost breathless. "Fly at once! Fly! Fly!"

Rudizo flew; and for the second time Starlita had to tell her friends of her failure.

"There is no use in trying again," she said, discouraged. "There is no one who could distract Zorro and make him forget."

"Well," said Pelotín, "if cleverness will not help us, we shall have to employ force. But, first, there is something that I wish to learn. Because of my small size, I can hide almost anywhere; so I will remain here in the palace."

He did so; and when every one was asleep he slipped into Zorro's room and very carefully, with his claws, drew out the keys which Zorro guarded under his pillow.

Starlita was waiting for him.

"Now," he said to her, "I must open the three cupboards which these three keys fit. Perhaps we will find in them something that will be useful to us."

They hurried to the hall of the palace, where the cupboards were. In the first they found only sacks of gold and precious stones. Pelotín stood twisting his whiskers—he was very proud of those whiskers! —a moment in thought. Then, satisfied with what he had seen, he shut the door and opened the second cupboard. It was filled with fish-scales, of silver, and pearl, and coral.

"Pelotín!" Starlita whispered. "What we are doing is very dangerous. Suppose we are discovered!"

"Have patience, dear," the little mouse replied. "We are now at the last one."

The third cupboard contained some very unusual things. The mouse jumped from shelf to shelf and, with wonderful ease, read the inscriptions on the boxes and jars which the cupboard contained. At last a cry of happiness escaped him and he grabbed one of the boxes, which happened to be very small.

"Shut the door quickly, Starlita!" he said gaily. "I have found what I want!"

With the utmost care he returned the keys to their place under the pillow of the sleeping Zorro, and then slipped out of the palace, carrying with him the precious box.

IX

THE HYRDA OF THE SEVEN HEADS

THE four conspirators waited with impatience for the hour when they could get together. Starlita, as every night, carried them some food, which Zorro guarded as closely as he guarded her. She always managed to have some for her friends, though, and, together with some delicious seaweed which Aurelio had discovered, they managed very well.

When they had eaten what Starlita brought, Pelotín, proudly stroking his white whiskers, told them his plan:

"My very dear friends," said he, "the time has come when we must act. We cannot remain forever at the bottom of this beautiful lake. We tried cunning; it did no good. Now we will try another plan. We know that the Hydra guards the golden thistle. Yesterday I started out to look at this monster. As I drew near his cave he raised his seven heads furiously, and I hid quickly behind some rocks. Then I heard him begin to shout something to a giant hedgehog—of the two, I don't know which was the more ferocious. But at the end of the discussion I had learned something that interested me. The hedgehog, getting ready to leave, said:

" 'Oh, yes; your fierceness would frighten anybody; but don't forget that the day all seven heads sleep you will be helpless in the hands of any one who wishes to come near. I, even asleep, have nothing to fear; for my bristles defend me against surprise.'

" 'What you say is absurd!' the Hydra replied furiously. 'You know that I never sleep with all seven heads at the same time; while some sleep, the others keep watch.'

" 'It is not easy to deceive me, my friend,' said the hedgehog. 'It all depends on whether some one robs the cupboard in the hall of Zorro's palace of a

certain little box whose inscription reads, *The Seven Sleeps of the Hydra,* and—'

"'Hush!' exclaimed the Hydra, looking around with his seven heads until I thought surely he would see me. 'Who has told you that secret which nobody should reveal?'

"At that he threw himself over the hedgehog, and they were fighting furiously when I slipped away to join you. Now you understand why I searched the cupboards last night. I have the box—thanks to the hedgehog."

Pelotín reached down to the bottom of his pocket and brought out the little box marked *The Seven Sleeps of the Hydra.* Inside were seven pills, each of a different color.

"My plan," continued the little mouse, "is this: We have no time to lose, as Zorro may discover at any minute that the box is no longer in the cupboard. We will go at once to the cave of this monster. You remain at a little distance and leave the rest to me. Once I have the seven heads asleep, you, Aurelio, who are the largest, hurry into the cave, find the golden thistle, guard it carefully; and then we will go as fast as we can to the door of gold—once past that we are safe."

Guided by Pelotín, they at last reached a spot in front of the Hydra's cave where they were to wait, hidden among the rocks.

The small mouse scampered easily over and under rocks until he reached some large flat stones that hung over the entrance to the cavern. The monster lay there, all seven heads wide awake. Pelotín took from a small bag which he carried over his shoulder a very fine cord, woven of seaweed, on the end of which he tied a snail-shell. Now, the Hydra was very fond indeed of a nice fat snail; and when he saw the shell come dangling in front of his nose he lost no time in opening his wide mouth to snap at it. At that instant Pelotín dropped one of the seven pills, and it fell right into the monster's enormous open mouth. The mouth snapped shut; and instantly that head dropped in a sound sleep.

Six times more Pelotín did this, and every time the pill fell squarely in between the powerful jaws of the Hydra.

Aurelio was waiting eagerly; and the instant the seventh head was asleep he ran past the monster, into the cave, and found almost at once what he was hunting—the golden thistle.

Without losing a minute, the four now started out as fast as they could go for the door of gold. The distance they had to cover was very great; and, as they very well knew, the chances of their falling into the hands of Rudizo or Zorro were even greater.

X

"BABILABÚ!"

RUDIZO arrived at the coral palace at his usual hour that day, and stopped a moment to talk with his friend Zorro. Then, seeing that Starlita did not come to meet him, he sent a salmon to look for her. The messenger returned soon, to report that no one answered when he knocked at her door.

Rudizo and Zorro, alarmed, ran to the apartment of Starlita and broke in her door. Their rage at finding the room empty is beyond description. They searched the house, the gardens, the surrounding coral forests; then they hurried to the cupboard in the hall of the palace and found the precious box missing. So! Some one had been into the palace, into the cupboard, and had helped Starlita to escape! Sure now of her flight, Zorro summoned his police squadron of trout and sea-bass.

The fish police, flapping their fins and swishing their tails, darted here, there, everywhere, searching the coral groves and the seaweed forests, accompanied always by Rudizo and Zorro. Thus they lost many hours. In the meantime Starlita and her companions were hurrying on their way.

The four fugitives were not so very far from the door of gold when they suddenly heard a great swish-

ing in the water and, turning, saw the whole police squadron coming after them, with Rudizo in the background. If only they could reach the golden door! But they knew it was impossible.

They swam quickly over to a place where the corals joined together their pink and white and rose-colored branches, and, interlaced in them, the octopuses wound their tentacles, while lobsters and tortoises marched up and down, like sentinels. Mimí, without stopping, tore off one of her silver scales and, throwing it among them, cried:

"Babilabú!
Dear crabs and corals, please form a wall
To keep Rudizo away;
Kind octopuses, lobsters, turtles, all,
Come to our aid, we pray!"

As if by magic, the branches of the corals and the tentacles of the octopuses opened to let the fugitives pass, and then wove themselves together into a tight wall, with the shells of conches and oysters and lobsters and turtles for a solid foundation.

Rudizo's efforts to pass were useless; he had to wait there a whole hour until Zorro arrived. Everything under the water had to obey Zorro; and so the wall reluctantly separated when he commanded.

In the meantime the fugitives had almost reached the door; but they could not swim so fast as Rudizo and Zorro, who were mounted on dolphins; and once

more they heard their persecutors approaching. What *could* they do?

Mimí tore off another of her silver scales and threw it into a bed of oysters and conches that were resting in their shells. But the silver scale would not work without the magic word; and so she said it quickly:

"Babilabú!
Little shells, the enemy's behind us!
Your pearly gates open wide.
Rudizo is coming to find us;
Please give us a place to hide!"

Two oysters of enormous size and two smaller ones opened their shells, and shut them quickly when Starlita, Aurelio, Mimí and Pelotín were once safe inside. And they were just in time. For Rudizo, Zorro, and all his fish squadron arrived at that instant. Not seeing any one, of course they hurried on.

The fugitives thanked the friendly oysters most sincerely for coming to their aid at a time so critical. Then they started on their way again. To their great relief, they saw the door of gold shining ahead of them, only a few feet away. But, suddenly the water began to move, and there, between them and the door, was Rudizo! He had left the others and come straight for the door, suspecting that Starlita would try to escape through it.

The four stopped, terrified. So near to salvation —only a few feet more—and now to lose! Poor Mimí was overwhelmed. But not little Pelotín. Jerking off his mouse's whiskers, he threw them between themselves and Rudizo, at the same time crying:

"Babilabú!
Good whiskers, once my pride, go, go!
Turn to a fish's spear
And chase the cruel Rudizo, so
He'll stay forever here!"

The little whiskers began to grow rapidly, until they were soon turned into an enormous sword-fish, which began to thrust its sword-point into Rudizo, running after him. Rudizo saw that he would have to fly, to escape the persecution of the giant sword-fish; but he could not get away from it. It chased him to the other side of the lake and cornered him in a cave of coral, far, far away from the door of gold.

In the meantime the four had reached the door.

"Babilabú!" cried Pelotín.

It opened instantly, letting them pass through; then shut quickly again.

Up the narrow staircase they climbed and climbed and climbed; and at last they found themselves at the top, and then, to their great joy, out on the shore.

"The sun is setting!" cried Aurelio. "And Rudizo is still in the lake!"

"The sword-fish will hold him there until the last ray disappears," Pelotín said; "and then it too will disappear. But it will be too late for Rudizo. He has lost his power and must remain forever at the bottom of the lake."

At that moment the water rose in gigantic waves, as if pushed by some terrible torment. It was Rudizo, the cruel sorcerer, giving vent to his rage on discovering his fate.

XI

THE GOLDEN THISTLE

AURELIO touched Starlita with the golden thistle, and immediately she recovered her human form. Then he turned to the little white mouse.

"Pelotín," he said, "will you tell me now who you and Mimí are? You seem to know us; and we owe you both so much."

"We cannot tell our names until we are disenchanted. Surely you must know that we, too, are victims of the cruel Rudizo. Now that you have—"

Before he finished speaking Aurelio had touched him and Mimí with the golden thistle.

"Carlos! Natalia!" Aurelio and Starlita exclaimed together; and, laughing and crying at the same time, they fell into each other's arms.

They set out at once for the Castle of Floridel.

Night had fallen when they reached the stone bridge, and as they were passing over it they came upon the beautiful lion. The little girls drew back.

"Don't be afraid," said Aurelio, going up and stroking the lion's handsome mane.

"Why don't you touch it with the golden thistle?" suggested Carlos. "Perhaps it is some more of Rudizo's work."

Aurelio rubbed the flower gently over the lion's head. In a flash the lion had disappeared and, with a cry of joy, the good Count of Floridel stood there, his arms opened wide to embrace his little son and daughter.

They hurried across the bridge and into the garden of Floridel. To their surprise, the whole castle was brilliantly lighted.

"I know what has happened!" exclaimed Carlos. "The good Fairy Kindheart knows that we have succeeded, and she has come to meet us."

That, indeed, proved to be the case; and you may be sure there was great rejoicing in the Castle of Floridel, for many days thereafter.

II

THE MAGIC GIFTS

I

THE LITTLE SON

IN the outskirts of a beautiful little village in the powerful kingdom of Three Stars there lived a laborer and his good wife. Their farm was small and their house was only a cottage; but they lived happily, Pedro working on the farm and Marta tending to the house and doing occasional needlework which she sold to the rich.

Not being ambitious people they would have lived contentedly for the rest of their lives, except for one very strong wish. They wanted a little boy. One day a wee son came to them; and then their joy knew no bounds.

The baby grew rapidly and each day became more good and more beautiful; and his unusual intelligence astonished the whole village.

"Marta," Pedro said to her one night, when little Gonzalito was ten years old, "our boy should go to school and study; he has too much talent to let him grow up as ignorant as we are."

Marta agreed; and a week later Gonzalito started to the village school. Every morning he would get up early, have his breakfast of porridge and milk,

and go alone to the school, cutting across the fields to shorten the distance. In the afternoon Pedro would call for him with his mule, and they would ride home together. Thus five years passed; and at fifteen Gonzalito knew more than his teachers.

Marta was seated on the doorstep of her cottage one afternoon, busy at her needlework and thinking of Gonzalito's future, when a coach stopped in front of her door and an old man stepped out and approached her.

"Good day," he said pleasantly. "Are you, perhaps, the mother of Gonzalito?"

"Yes," replied Marta proudly.

"My name is Solón. I am working on a history of this part of the country, and I need a bright boy to help me. I was told in the village that your son is just the boy I want, and I have come to beg you to let me have him. I will pay him ten escudos a month."

Marta was delighted to have such an opportunity for Gonzalito. But she did not want to answer before consulting him and his father; so she asked the gentleman to return the following morning.

Pedro and Gonzalito were as greatly delighted as Marta; and accordingly it was agreed that every day he should go to the beautiful place which Solón had leased, returning home at dark.

Five more years passed. Gonzalito not only had gained much of Solón's wisdom but, spending every

day with so distinguished a gentleman, his manners were so polished that no one, seeing him, would believe he was the son of the poor laborers. Far from being ashamed of his parents, however, Gonzalito adored them more and more each day, and wished he were able to give them some proof of his immense love.

One afternoon Solón called him.

"I have finished the work that brought me here," he said; "and I must return to my home. It is a shame for a boy like you to remain in this little village. Go to Three Stars, the capital of this kingdom, and there, with your education and the training I have given you, you surely will get some splendid position, and then you can give your parents a happy and quiet old age."

Gonzalito felt very sad at losing his kind friend and teacher; but he thought over Solón's advice; and that night he discussed the matter with his parents.

"In Three Stars," he said, "I could soon earn enough money to keep you from having to work so hard. I do not like to see you tire yourself, Father, working on the farm; nor Mother at her sewing. Your tired arms and your tired eyes need resting."

"But what will we do without you?" exclaimed both parents at the same time. "Moreover," went on Pedro, "we are used to working, and an idle life would kill us."

"Oh, you can always do what work you want to; but it will be just for pleasure—not because you have to do it. I am twenty years old; and it is time for me to put to some use the good education you have given me."

"Perhaps you are right; but it frightens us to have you go alone to the capital. To get there, you must pass through the Enchanted Forest. Strange things are told of those woods, where the animals all talk, and other queer things happen. No one around here was ever brave enough to venture into the Enchanted Forest. The truth is that one also can go to Three Stars by boat; but the water route is only for the rich and is far too costly for us."

"Do not fear for me, Father," Gonzalito said stoutly. "My intentions are good; nothing bad can possibly happen to me."

So, a few days later, embracing his weeping parents and promising them that very, very soon he would return, Gonzalito started on his journey, happy and confident. He left poor Pedro and Marta standing in the doorway, sobbing in each other's arms.

II

THE GIFTS OF THE ANIMALS

AFTER walking steadily for seven days, Gonzalito arrived at the Enchanted Forest. He

stopped a moment to look about him, and then marched in bravely. About noon, being very hungry, he sat down on the ground and took out some food which he carried in his knapsack. Before he had taken the first bite, however, he heard a noise behind him and, turning his head, he saw a lovely deer leaping toward him.

"Gonzalito," the deer said, stopping a few feet away, "I am hungry. Will you give me something to eat?"

"Certainly," Gonzalito answered at once. "I haven't very much, but you may have part of it."

"Thank you," the deer said when he had eaten the food. "Now I wish to make you a gift, to reward you for your generosity. What would you like?"

"I do not need anything, Mr. Deer. But my father, who is old, gets tired easily. His spade is very heavy; if you could give me a lighter one I should be most grateful."

"You are a good son to forget yourself and think of your father. You deserve to be rewarded well. Come!"

Gonzalito followed the deer to a big tree not far away. Here the deer pawed at the ground a moment with his hoof, and dug up a very tiny spade, which he gave to Gonzalito.

"Thank you, Mr. Deer," said Gonzalito; although he really thought the deer was making fun of him

in giving him this little toy when he wanted a spade for his father.

"I see that you do not know how to appreciate my gift. I will show you how to use it."

Putting the spade on the ground, the deer exclaimed:

"Dig, dig, good spade, dig, dig,
And make the earth flop, flop!
O good little spade, dig, dig,
Until I say stop, stop!"

Immediately, without any one touching it, the spade began to move so rapidly that in five minutes it had dug up all the ground within sight.

Then the deer cried:

"Stop, stop, good spade, stop, stop!
You've made the earth fly, fly.
O good little spade, stop, stop!
I'll need you by and by."

The spade stopped instantly, and jumped into Gonzalito's knapsack. The happiness of Gonzalito is beyond description. He wished to rush home at once to carry the magic spade to his father; but he knew that would mean another sad parting; so he kept on his way, after giving his heartiest thanks to the kind deer.

He had walked a short distance through the Forest when he saw flying toward him a frightened dove,

which was being chased by a fierce hawk. Gonzalito, grabbing up a stone, threw it so accurately that the hawk fell to the earth.

"Oh, how can I repay you," cooed the dove, "for what you have done for me? Ask me what you will. I shall have real pleasure in giving it."

"Thank you," said Gonzalito. "For myself I will ask nothing; but for my mother. She is old, and it tires her to move the needle back and forth. If you could give me a needle that would lessen her fatigue—"

The dove pulled a white feather out of one of her wings, and filed it against a tree-trunk until it was transformed into a soft needle.

"Give me your handkerchief," she said to the astonished Gonzalito.

He obeyed; and the lovely dove, tearing the handkerchief in half, held the needle in her claw and exclaimed:

"Sew, little needle, sew,
And do not rest!
The dove begs you
To do your best!"

The needle jumped from her claw to the handkerchief; and in a second no one would have known that the handkerchief had ever been torn.

Mad with happiness now, Gonzalito wrapped the precious needle in his handkerchief and stowed it

away in his knapsack. Already he was able to save his father's tired arms and his mother's tired eyes!

Thanking the dove effusively, he started once more on his way. For three days he walked through the Enchanted Forest without anything extraordinary happening to him. Then, in the afternoon of the fourth day, he began to hear ahead of him sad cries and groans. He hurried forward, drawing nearer and nearer, and soon he came upon a beautiful lion with its feet caught in a strong trap.

Gonzalito ran to the lion and, cutting with his penknife the cords and wires which bound him, had him free in a moment.

"Thank you," said the lion. "What do you wish in payment for the great favor that you have done me?"

"Nothing, sir. I am only glad to know that I have helped you."

"I see that you are very kind. But it shall not be said that you have served the King of the Forest and he did not reward you."

The lion pulled a hair out of his mane and gave it to Gonzalito.

"If at any time in your life you wish to go somewhere without being seen, take this hair in your hand and whisper these words:

"Through this little hair I ask for your aid;
O make me invisible, great lion unafraid!

And when you want to become visible again, all you have to do is to hold the hair and say:

"Through this little hair I ask for your aid;
O make me now visible, great lion unafraid!

"And now," the lion added, "so that you will not lose it, I will put it here."

He shook a tree and there fell from it a small fruit which looked precisely like a tiny box. In that Gonzalito guarded the hair carefully, after thanking the lion for his great kindness.

Not much farther on the young traveler passed a large cave. In front of it sat two magnificent bears, with their three small sons playing about them. The little bears had a drum which they were beating while they danced; but the two old bears were crying bitterly.

As Gonzalito was a kind-hearted boy, he went up and asked if he could help them in any way.

"Oh, yes," sobbed the father bear. "Mrs. Bear and I were pushed over a high precipice by a furious elephant. We managed to crawl home; but we are so badly hurt that we cannot sow our fields, and this year we shall have no crops. Our sons are so small that they can do nothing."

"Don't cry, dear bears," Gonzalito said; "I will do the work for you."

Picking up the sacks of wheat and corn which stood

ready, he scattered the grain up and down the furrows until the last seed had been planted.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried the happy bears. "We will pay you well for what you have done for us!"

Taking the drum which the little bears had thrown down, they gave it to Gonzalito.

"Whenever you wish it to play, just put the stick against it and say, three times:

"Tap, rattatap-tap!

Then it will give such music as you never heard. When you want it to stop, just take off the drumstick."

Gonzalito thanked the kind bears, and guarded the little drum in his knapsack; even though he thought that their gift would never be of much use to him.

On the following afternoon he came to the shore of a beautiful lake and saw in the water an unhappy little bird which had fallen there with a broken wing and was drowning. Gonzalito quickly waded in and rescued the bird and, carrying it ashore, bandaged its broken wing with some strong grass-blades.

"Thank you!" the bird murmured, while she shook the water out of her lovely feathers. "The big magpie, who is my worst enemy, tried to kill me so that she could steal the food that I have in my nest. I owe you my life. If you should ever find yourself in a difficulty, no matter how great it might be, perhaps

I can help you. Take this feather, and the day that you need me, kiss it and say these words:

"O little bird, with breast of blue,
O little bird, with heart so true,
Come, come, I pray,
Do not delay,
Fly quickly here, I beg of you,
Little bird!

I will come at once."

Gonzalito thanked the little bird and, closely guarding the precious blue feather, went on.

He was nearing the end of the Enchanted Forest when he came to a little creek that tumbled its way over rocks and sand between banks of purple violets. The spot was so beautiful that he paused a moment, to admire it; and as he stood there he saw a poor little fish lying on the bank gasping for breath.

Gonzalito picked it up quickly and put it into the creek.

"Thank you," said the little fish. "You have saved my life! If at any time you should ever need me, call me. My name is Piturín. If you say:

"Piturín, come to me!

I will hear you and come, if you are near some water."

With that, the fish disappeared, and Gonzalito went on.

Only about one hour's walk remained before he would be at the end of the Forest. But it was late in the afternoon and he was very tired, so he stopped to rest a while beside some fragrant honeysuckle vines. As he lay on the grass, he saw the light shimmer on an enormous spider-web, stretched near the ground; and when he looked for the spider he saw that a poor black beetle was caught fast in the web and trying its best to escape.

Gonzalito jumped up and ran to it, and soon had it free.

"Thank you, Gonzalito," it said. "To show my gratitude I will give you a little round stone."

Gonzalito did not think that much of a present; but he would not say so, because he did not wish to offend the beetle. Imagine his surprise when he saw the stone was of pure gold! But it was very small.

"If at any time in your life you need to overcome an enemy," the beetle said, "use this stone. Nothing can compare with it in destructive power."

Gonzalito thanked the little black beetle, and put the stone away carefully with his other treasures in his knapsack.

Two hours later he had left the Enchanted Forest behind and was nearing the great city of Three Stars.

III

THE UGLY DWARF

THE deep silence that reigned in such an immense city astonished Gonzalito. He stopped at a door where an old woman sat spinning at her wheel, and asked what could be the matter.

"Ah, sir," she wept, "we are very unhappy."

"Tell me what has happened, good mother. Perhaps I can help you in your troubles."

"You would have to be very powerful indeed to do that. But I see you are a stranger and do not know what has befallen us, so I will tell you. Sit down."

She pushed a chair toward him and stopped her work while she talked.

"Ten leagues from here," she began, "there lives a sorcerer whose heart is as ugly as his body. Picture to yourself a cross-eyed Dwarf, with a twisted nose, and an enormous open mouth from which a black, sharp-pointed tongue hangs between large yellow teeth. That is what the Dwarf looks like. His name is Esperpento. Nobody knows who he is or where he came from. Five years ago he arrived, riding through the air on a huge bat, and went to live at Mirondon—some old abandoned ruins which, in a single night, he turned into a magnificent marble

castle. The next day came twenty more dwarfs, as ugly as their prince.

"Of course you know that our good ruler, King Wladimiro, has been a widower for many years, and has no one but his daughter, the Princess Jacinta. Every one loves the Princess. She is a beautiful girl, and as good and kind as she is beautiful.

"King Etnu, of the neighboring country, wanted his son to marry Jacinta; so he sent the young Prince Virtildo here to become acquainted with our Princess.

"One week after Virtildo's arrival, Jacinta went for a walk with her two women companions. As it was a pleasant day they walked farther than they thought, and suddenly found themselves in front of the Castle of Mirondon. The Dwarf saw Jacinta and at once fell in love with her great beauty.

"The next day this hideous creature called at the palace of King Wladimiro and asked for the hand of the Princess.

"The King, as you can imagine, was profoundly astonished; but he knew the Dwarf's magic powers and he did not dare offend him. This is how he answered:

" 'I consider myself much honored by your offer, sir, but I regret to say you are too late. I have promised my neighbor, King Etnu, that Jacinta shall marry his son, if she herself wishes to do so. The

word of a king is sacred. I am sorry, therefore, that I cannot oblige you.'

"'If that is your *only* reason, you need not worry,' the Dwarf said; and with a strange laugh he left the palace.

"One week later, as Virtildo was passing Mirondon, the Dwarf ran out and forbade him to take another step toward the palace.

"'I will go where I please!' Virtildo said; and started forward. But he found the road blocked by the twenty ugly Dwarfs.

"Pulling out his sword, Virtildo rushed furiously at their master. Esperpento stood perfectly still, without attempting to defend himself; and the instant the sword touched him it fell to the ground, broken in three pieces. Thus disarmed, Virtildo grabbed a powerful club which he carried suspended from his belt and threw it at Esperpento's head. It fell with a crash on the Dwarf's skull and then, without hurting him in the least, it bounded back and wounded Virtildo on the forehead.

"'You see,' roared the Dwarf, 'nothing can hurt me. Go back to your father's country at once, and never dare approach Three Stars again! I will let you live to-day; but that wound on your forehead will remind you that it is better to obey the Prince of Mirondon!'

"Seeing that he could do nothing else, the unhappy

Prince returned sorrowfully to his own kingdom, followed by his two shield-bearers. In the meantime, two laborers who had been working near ran to Three Stars and told the King what had happened. Alarmed, he called his Councilors together to advise him as to what could be done against an enemy so powerful that no kind of sword or club could harm him. They knew that the Dwarf would come again to ask for the Princess. They dared not refuse him, for fear of his revenge; and they could not think of a single thing to do except to put him off with excuses as long as they could."

Here the old woman paused a moment, overcome by the memory of what had happened.

IV

THE UNHAPPY PRINCESS

GONZALITO did not know what to say, to comfort the good woman; so he did not speak; and at last she wiped away her tears and continued her story.

"Two days afterward the Dwarf arrived at the palace and gave the broken sword to the King.

" 'Sir,' he said, 'you are no longer bound by your word. I give you this as a proof that I vanquished my rival and he fled back to his own kingdom, never

to return. I now ask to see the Princess Jacinta.'

"The King ordered a page to tell Jacinta to come to him. After a few minutes the page returned with this message:

" 'The Princess begs that Sir Esperpento will excuse her. She cannot come just now, as she is busy gathering flowers in the garden.'

"The infuriated Dwarf ran to a window that looked out over the garden and, giving three claps of his hands, cried:

" 'Where roses blow
And lilies grow
Rank weeds and brambles be!
Where flowers glow
And beauty show
An ugly briarpatch see!'

"Scarcely had the Dwarf uttered these words when every flower in the garden disappeared, and in their stead grew a tangle of briars and ill-smelling weeds. Jacinta's cry at losing all her beautiful plants reached the King and Esperpento. The Dwarf laughed.

" ' The day that your daughter consents to marry me,' he said, 'her flowers will return, more beautiful than ever. But the next time I come to ask for her, she will not be able to say she is busy with her flowers!'

"With that the Dwarf left the palace. The little

Princess cried, day and night, for a whole month; and then Esperpento appeared again.

"'Sir,' he said, as soon as he had kissed the King's hand, 'I wish to see the Princess Jacinta.'

"'Go find my daughter,' the King said to one of his attendants.

"The man soon returned, with this message:

"'The Princess begs that Sir Esperpento will have the kindness to excuse her. It is impossible for her to come now, as she is with her dressmaker, trying on a new gown.'

"The Dwarf ran to the door which was nearest Jacinta's apartments and, clapping his hands three times, cried:

> "'Needle with which she tries to sew,
> Promptly break, so she may know
> Never another gown she'll see
> Till she says she'll marry me!'

"The dressmaker at that moment was taking a stitch, but the needle broke in her hand. She took another, and it broke; and—well, the truth is, sir, that has been nearly a year ago and the Princess has never had another dress because there is no needle that will not break at the first stitch."

The narrative was interrupted by fresh sobbing on the part of the old woman; but she soon controlled herself.

"I will continue the tale now," she said, as she

wiped the last tear away. "But perhaps it is too long?"

"On the contrary," Gonzalito assured her, "I am very much interested in it and should like to hear the rest."

"Well, the Dwarf, having taken this new revenge, now said to the King:

" 'The day that your daughter becomes my wife she shall have all the gowns that she can desire. In the meantime it is well for you to consider what happens when my wishes are disregarded. There will come a time when excuses will not do!'

"With that he left the palace and returned to his castle.

"Poor Jacinta was now ill from crying and worrying; so that when, a week later, this hideous monster came back to Three Stars, the people, who worship the Princess, grabbed up sticks and stones and rushed at him. It would have gone badly with him if he had not been armed with his magic power of being invulnerable to blows. As it was, he was not hurt, of course; but he was furious. Clapping his hands three times, he cried:

" 'Earth, earth, that gives the grain they need,
I order you, in rage profound,
To change to little stones all seed
They scatter here upon the ground!'

"This new sorcery of Esperpento's has left us

without a harvest. In vain we plowed the fields and planted the wheat and corn. The seeds turned into little stones as fast as they touched the ground. What are we to do! Throughout this great country that once was so rich and fertile all now is hunger and misery.

"But that is not the worst! A month ago a messenger came from the Castle of Mirondon to tell the King that the Dwarf is tired of waiting, and if Jacinta does not marry him within sixty days he will wreak upon the King, the Princess, and all the kingdom of Three Stars the most horrible vengeance that he can invent. O what shall we *do?*"

"What has kept him from carrying off the Princess and marrying her anyway, if he can work such magic?" Gonzalito questioned.

"Ah! We have often asked just that. We think she is so good, her heart is so pure, that his magic can't touch her. The King has posted notices all over the kingdom, offering the greatest possible reward to any one who will save Jacinta from this horrible Dwarf. Every citizen in Three Stars is willing, even eager, to do his utmost; but they all know that they are powerless against this monster.

"One month has passed; only one more now remains before the Dwarf's hideous plans will be carried out; and nobody yet has thought of any possible way to save the lovely Princess. At all hours of the day and night the palace is open, hoping that *some*

one will come—some one brave enough to try to kill the Dwarf or drive him out of the country; for the King is convinced that that only will save us all. No one as yet has dared offer himself; and the days keep passing. O what shall we do!"

The poor woman fell to weeping more bitterly than ever.

"Thank you a thousand times for your interesting story," Gonzalito said. "Now I shall hurry to the palace, to tell the King that *I* shall get rid of this Dwarf!"

Old Olivia stopped her weeping long enough to stare at him in astonishment.

V

THE SPADE AND THE NEEDLE

I WISH to ask you a favor, good mother," Gonzalito said to the old woman. "Will you let me live in your house?"

"With the greatest pleasure, sir. I am all alone in the world, and I shall look after you as if you were my son."

She took Gonzalito to a small but very clean and comfortable room; and here the young traveler bathed and put on a new suit which he carried in his knapsack; and then, tying in a little parcel the gifts

of the animals of the Enchanted Forest, he went to find the good woman, Olivia, to ask her to accompany him to the palace.

At the royal gates a sentinel let them pass without question; and when they came to the door of the palace they found a page there ready to usher them into the throne room.

"Your Majesty," said Gonzalito, bending on one knee and kissing the King's hand respectfully, "I know all of your misfortunes, and I have come to beg for the privilege of vanquishing this Dwarf. I shall either kill him or drive him forever out of the country."

King Wladimiro was astonished to hear this, and to see how young was the speaker; but the boy's confidence and genteel manner pleased him.

"I am grateful for your good intentions," he replied; "but I am afraid it is impossible to accomplish what you wish to undertake; and if you should fail and displease Esperpento you would only increase our misfortunes by bringing upon us some new sorcery."

"Tell me," said Gonzalito, "what I must do to prove my ability."

The King, looking at him sadly, showed him from a window the briars and nettles in Jacinta's garden, which a year before had been a mass of beautiful, fragrant flowers.

"If you can make those briars disappear, and

flowers come in their stead, I will believe that you can at least *try* to overcome Esperpento."

"Is that all?" Gonzalito asked. "Order your servants to take me to the garden."

Two pages went with him, through the marble hall of the palace, down the broad steps, into Jacinta's once lovely garden. On the way Gonzalito had slipped the little spade out of his parcel, and now he whispered to it:

"Dig, dig, good spade, dig, dig,
And make the earth flop, flop!
O good little spade, dig, dig,
Until I say stop, stop!"

The instant the spade touched the ground it began to dig, to dig, so fast and furiously that it could not be seen as it hopped back and forth. And the briars began to fall and wither, and the weeds, and the thistles and the nettles. And as fast as these unsightly things fell, in their places, as if by magic, appeared all the lovely flowers. First came the roses, then the lilies and the jasmines, and the carnations and the daffodils.

Jacinta, watching from an upper window, ran down to the throne room to embrace her father.

"What has happened?" she cried, mad with delight. "Who, who is this young man who can work such magic?"

"Ask him yourself; for here he is."

At that moment Gonzalito entered the room, and having heard the last words, he answered without waiting to be questioned.

"My name is Gonzalito. I have come to Three Stars to earn enough money to make my parents happy in their old age, as they are very poor and have to work hard. They have given me a good education, and now I hope to make use of it."

"You are a good son," said the King. "If you should succeed in freeing us from this awful calamity that hangs over us, I will give you a palace and a large income, so that you may bring your parents here to live in comfort."

"Ah, sir, what would I not undertake to earn that! I am completely at your service."

Gonzalito noticed that the Princess was looking sadly at her dress, which was old and worn. He remembered, then, what Olivia had told him.

"Order your dressmaker, beautiful Princess, to bring the cloth and cut out as many dresses as you wish; I promise that they will be sewed and ready to wear before nightfall."

"Oh, sir," Jacinta exclaimed jubilantly, "in the blue room there are many gowns all cut out and pinned together, but, alas, not sewed. I will take you there."

When Gonzalito was shut up alone in the blue room, he took out the needle which the dove had given him and said to it:

"Sew, little needle, sew,
And do not rest!
The dove begs you
To do your best!"

The needle began to sew, to sew so quickly that in two hours twenty lovely dresses lay finished. Gonzalito took them to the Princess, and she was more than delighted—not only to have the new gowns but because she felt sure, now, that Gonzalito could save her and her father's kingdom from the wicked Dwarf.

During the two hours that Gonzalito was shut into the blue room with the busy needle, he thought out all of his plan of attack against this cruel Esperpento; so that when the King assured him that he now had full confidence in him and could permit him to undertake the seemingly impossible task, Gonzalito was quite ready.

"To-morrow I shall start for Mirondon," he said. "I do not know when I shall return; but if you should not hear from me, do not lose confidence. I don't wish to do too quickly a thing so important. First, I must learn where Esperpento's vulnerable spot is, so that I may not give him any unnecessary blows, which would only madden him. I shall not start for Mirondon until to-morrow because before I go I wish to surprise the good citizens of Three Stars. At sunrise, where now the little stones lie, they will see acres upon acres of rippling wheat!"

"Oh, how can I repay you for such mercies!" exclaimed the King.

"By keeping your promise about my parents."

"You have my word; and the word of a king is sacred. But you deserve much more than I have promised."

Gonzalito's heart beat quickly when he saw the Princess blush and lower her lovely eyes.

"Ah!" he thought. "If some day I could win her!"

But he tried to get rid of this hope; and, turning to the King, he answered staunchly:

"What greater recompense could I have than the knowledge that I had saved the Princess from such a fate!"

"Your words show your good heart. But while you are away on your dangerous mission I shall try to think of some reward worthy of you."

VI

THE MIRACULOUS BIRD

THAT night Gonzalito, instead of returning to the house of Olivia, went into the fields and, taking out of his parcel the blue feather the little bird had given him, he kissed it, murmuring:

"O little bird, with breast of blue,
O little bird, with heart so true,
Come, come, I pray,
Do not delay,
Fly quickly here, I beg of you,
Little bird!"

Instantly he heard the soft beat of wings, and a moment later the bird alighted on his shoulder.

"What do you wish?" it trilled sweetly.

Gonzalito told the bird all that had happened.

Without answering, it threw back its head and began to sing the most marvelous notes Gonzalito had ever heard. A second later the air was filled with millions of birds, which came from all directions, and immediately were lost in the distance, all flying toward the Castle of Mirondon. There, with their strong beaks, they broke a window of the Dwarf's granary and flew in to his well-stored rooms of wheat and corn. Each bird grabbed a grain in its bill and flew out again; and these millions of seeds were scattered all over the fields of Three Stars. As the grain was enchanted, it began to grow at once, of course; and the next morning the amazed and delighted people saw, instead of bare earth and little stones, a sea of waving, yellowing wheat. Their joy was without limit. Informed by Olivia that this blessing was brought to them by Gonzalito, they ran after him, acclaiming him a hero, and begging him never to leave them. The poor woman herself was

astonished at her own good fortune in having lodged in her house such a wonderful guest.

Early in the afternoon Gonzalito returned to the palace, and King Wladimiro renewed his great thanks and his expressions of confidence in the young man.

Thus encouraged by the friendship of the good King and of the lovely Princess Jacinta, Gonzalito went back to the house of Olivia, stopping only long enough to say good-by; and then he started, all alone, for the Castle of Mirondon.

VII

THE DWARF'S SECRET

"IT is necessary," Gonzalito said to himself, as he walked along gaily, "to learn, first of all, just what is the best way to attack the Dwarf; swords and clubs do not hurt him, but surely something must. It seems to me the best thing I can do is to become invisible."

This was as easily done as said; for when he drew near the castle he took out the lion's hair and murmured:

> "Through this little hair, I ask for your aid;
> O make me invisible, great lion unafraid!"

Sure now that he would not be seen, Gonzalito

passed quickly between the sentinels and, without stopping to admire the magnificent marble castle with its turrets reaching up to the sky, he went directly toward the kitchen, hoping to learn something useful from the talk of the servants. It was not at all difficult to find the kitchen, for he was guided by the delicious aroma that came from the food being prepared for Esperpento. Although invisible to the Dwarfs, Gonzalito nevertheless was very hungry.

By great good fortune, when he entered the kitchen there was no one there. The first thing he saw was a large platter containing a roasted turkey, all carved ready for serving, and he grabbed a drumstick in each hand and began to eat it with great relish, for it was deliciously cooked. When he had finished and thrown the bones behind the stove, and was reaching for another piece, the door opened and ten Dwarfs filed into the kitchen and sat around the table, ready for their dinner. The cook started to serve the turkey.

"What!" he exclaimed. "The drumsticks are gone!" He looked around suspiciously at the Dwarfs; but he knew that none of them could have been in the kitchen. "Some more of Esperpento's magic!" he murmured to himself. "He must have made me eat them, bones and all, without knowing anything about it!"

Gonzalito did not learn anything useful from their conversation that day; but the next day he was more

fortunate. A servant he had not seen before sat at the table with the Dwarfs this time.

"How is it," the cook asked him, "that the Prince leaves you free to-day?"

"Oh, he is furious because he has found his granaries empty, and all the fields of Three Stars covered with tall wheat, and he wants to be alone now to plot out his vengeance upon the person who dared to interfere. Poor fellow, whoever he is! He is a lost man! Only we can even suspect the barbarous revenge that Esperpento will take, and we have sworn that never a word will leave our lips."

"I do not think that if the secret were told it would help anybody. You know that the only vulnerable spot Esperpento has is in his throat; and no one could reach that because of the enchanted coat of mail that he always wears around his neck."

"Tell us," said one of the Dwarfs who had not yet spoken, "is our Prince very angry?"

"Angry! Why, he is so furious that—well, you know his passion for candy—he refuses to touch even a chocolate-drop—his favorite of all!"

Gonzalito did not wait for more; for he had learned what he so eagerly wished to know. Overjoyed, he quickly left the castle; and as he came near Three Stars he exclaimed:

"Through this little hair, I ask for your aid;
O make me now visible, great lion unafraid!"

Then, without stopping a moment, he hurried to the palace of the King. Kissing the King's hand and the hand of the lovely Princess, he announced at once, knowing their great anxiety:

"The Princess is saved! Have you confidence in me?"

"Absolute!" the father and the daughter answered together.

"Then carry out my instructions without asking for details or reasons. I am afraid, Your Majesty, that you will not want to do what is so very necessary. I must have a letter from you that I may present to Esperpento, telling him that the Princess accepts the honor of being his wife, and inviting him to dine here, to celebrate the marriage."

Jacinta was alarmed at hearing this; but only for a moment. When she looked at Gonzalito she regained her confidence in him, and begged her father to consent.

The King wrote the letter; and with it and with a retinue of horsemen and shield-bearers, Gonzalito set out in great state for the Castle of Mirondon.

When they arrived at the gates, the sentinels were told to announce that an ambassador from the King wished to see Esperpento.

Gonzalito was ushered into the castle immediately and, bowing low before the hideous Dwarf, he delivered the King's letter. When Esperpento read it he was so filled with delight that he quite forgot

all his recent plans of vengeance. He heaped gifts upon the bearer of this excellent news and upon all his followers—who then lost no time in getting as far as possible away from Mirondon.

When they reached Three Stars, Gonzalito went directly home and asked Olivia to make for him a half-dozen delicious chocolate-drops, telling her that when she had the fondant ready he wanted to shape it. This he did, slipping into one of them the little golden stone that the beetle had given him.

The next day he took the chocolate-drops to the palace and gave them to the Princess.

"Guard these very carefully," he said; "and when Esperpento comes, offer them to him, telling him that you made them yourself especially to please him."

The Princess promised to do this.

Preceded by his twenty ugly Dwarfs, ridiculously dressed in suits of green and yellow and red, the horrible Esperpento made his triumphal entry into Three Stars seated in a carriage of gold, the sides decorated with his coat-of-arms—a lizard crowned with nettles. He wore trousers of bright crimson velvet, a blue jacket, and a purple cape; and this showy dress made more prominent than ever his extreme hideousness.

In the throne room, where the King received his guest with great honors, the Dwarf kissed the hand of Jacinta and then took a seat beside her.

"INSTANTLY THE DWARFS GRABBED UP THE BODY OF THEIR MASTER AND FLEW WITH IT UP THE BIG CHIMNEY"

"Excuse me for a moment," she murmured. "I have something for you."

Almost at once she returned and gave him a little marble casket, magnificently carved and tinted. Inside, wrapped in paper of pure silver, the delighted Dwarf found the six chocolate-drops.

"I made them myself, to give to you," the Princess said with a sweet smile.

Esperpento was overjoyed. His favorite confection! And a proof of Jacinta's love for him! The chocolate-drops looked so delicious that he ate them greedily, one after another. But scarcely had the golden stone touched his throat when the Dwarf gave a scream and dropped dead. Instantly the twenty Dwarfs, with cries of alarm, rushed into the room, grabbed up the body of their master, and flew with it up the big chimney of the palace; at the same instant a loud crash that sounded like a million thunderpeals rolled into one told the people of Three Stars that the Castle of Mirondon was once more a place of old, weed-grown ruins.

The Princess, frightened at first by the sudden tragedy, soon realized that there was no other way than to use against such a cruel enemy some of his own weapons.

The delighted King did not know how to thank Gonzalito for what he had done for them. He gave him a magnificent palace and a large sum of money; and ordered the most elegant ship in all his kingdom

to be put at Gonzalito's disposal, that he might bring his parents to Three Stars.

VIII

A GOOD SON

SEATED in front of their cottage, Pedro and Marta were talking of their son, when, looking up, they saw coming toward them a very elegant young man.

"What a fine looking fellow!" Pedro exclaimed. "Perhaps he comes from Three Stars and brings us news of Gonzalito."

But the mother-heart made Marta know what her eyes could not see, and she jumped up with a cry of joy.

"It is our son—our son!"

With a speed unbelievable in such old people they ran to embrace their idolized boy. They could not cease admiring him.

"How handsome he is!" Marta would say. And, "He looks like a prince!" Pedro would exclaim. And then they would embrace him again.

When at last Gonzalito was able to talk, he told them all his adventures, offering them the palace with its riches.

"You see, dear parents, I owe all my fortune to

the animals of the Enchanted Forest, which used to cause us so much fear."

The inhabitants of the village and those of the neighboring city where the King's ship lay at anchor, well guarded, rushed to congratulate Pedro and Marta and to hear the adventures of Gonzalito.

"He has been rewarded because he is a good son," Marta said to them all. "It was not avarice that led him to go in search of riches, but a noble desire to help his parents."

Pedro and Marta were a little sad at leaving the cottage where they had been so happy; but Gonzalito promised to bring them back whenever they wished to return. So, placing the cottage and little farm in the care of a young couple, to whom they paid a large sum, the two old people went with Gonzalito to the adjacent city and embarked in the King's ship.

IX

THE UNGRATEFUL KING

WHAT, in the meantime, was happening in the city of Three Stars?

Envy is a wasp which hides in the laurel leaves that are placed as a crown on the head of a conqueror.

The ministers in the court of King Wladimiro

could not see without deep fury any one so young as Gonzalito accomplish what they did not know even how to begin to do. No sooner had Gonzalito started for his old home than they got together in a secret meeting and forged some papers which seemed to prove that on his return he intended to dethrone the King, so that the people, who worshiped Gonzalito for saving them, would name him in Wladimiro's stead.

The King at once fell into the trap; and, furious with rage, he refused to listen even to the Princess, who kept telling him that Gonzalito would never do such a thing. He was blind to reason; he forgot all that Gonzalito had done for him; he listened only to the infamies of his ministers. Becoming more and more enraged, he at last followed the Prime Minister's suggestion and gave orders that the ship bringing Gonzalito and his parents to Three Stars should be stopped in midwater and the three cast upon a desert island, to punish him for his treason.

All unconscious of this plotting against him, Gonzalito stood one afternoon on the ship's deck, looking over the railing into the sea. Suddenly he saw a wave begin to separate into two parts, and there in between appeared Piturín, the little fish he had helped in the Enchanted Forest.

"Are you alone, Gonzalito?" the fish asked.

Gonzalito looked around and saw no one near him.

"Yes," he said.

"Then I will tell you something."

Piturín told him all about the ministers' plotting. He had heard it when they walked beside the lake one night.

"Order the ship to be stopped at once," the fish said, "pretending that you wish to reach Three Stars in the daytime. Then, saying that you want to take a sail while you are waiting, get into the launch and land in the grove not far from the city. Make yourself invisible with the lion's hair, and enter the house of the Prime Minister. Lift the brick in the right hand corner of his office; take out the papers you will find there; then hurry to the palace and put them on a silver platter on which a servant carries mail to the King. Then make haste to return to your ship; and to-morrow you will be received with the honors that you deserve."

Gonzalito did all that the fish advised; and the next day not only was he given a triumphal reception but the King himself met him, took him into his arms, and named him his new Prime Minister.

What had happened in such a short time? When the servant carried the King his morning mail, Wladimiro picked up first a very large and bulky envelope. Imagine his surprise to find in it absolute proof that his ministers not only meant to dethrone him and have one of themselves named in his stead but, fearing Gonzalito's power, they plotted so that the King himself should destroy the

young man. Immediately upon learning this, Wladimiro called his soldiers and had the ministers thrown upon the same desert island where they wished to cast Gonzalito.

X

WAR AND MAGIC

GONZALITO did not have to wait long to prove that the King's confidence in him was not misplaced.

When the Dwarf ordered Virtildo back to his own kingdom, King Etnu was angered by what he thought was disrespect shown to his son; but he dared do nothing so long as Esperpento remained at Mirondon. Now he suddenly declared war, and the very next day a large army, commanded by his most valiant generals, besieged the beautiful city of Three Stars.

"What can we do!" exclaimed Wladimiro that night. "How can I get together my troops in such a short time! This year my grief as a father has made me forget my duties as a king; I have thought of nothing but my daughter; and my army is as disorganized as everything else in my kingdom. Etnu's spies have told him that nothing would stop his army now, and he could easily add Three Stars to his own territory."

"Do not worry, sir," Gonzalito said. "I think I can save you."

He hurried home and gave a word of comfort to his parents; then, seizing the magic spade and the drum—the gift of the bears—he ran to the walls of the city, and passed through the gates to the country outside. There, with his little spade, he indicated a circle which went all round the wall, even to the sea; then he dropped the spade, exclaiming:

"Dig, dig, good spade, dig, dig,
And make the earth flop, flop!
O good little spade, dig, dig,
Until I say stop, stop!"

The spade dug so quickly that in a short time the whole city was protected by an impassable moat, filled with water from the sea. When the work was finished, Gonzalito, watching the marvelous little tool from the top of the wall, cried to it:

"Stop, stop, good spade, stop, stop!
You've made the earth fly, fly.
O good little spade, stop, stop!
I'll need you by and by."

With one big jump, the spade was in Gonzalito's pocket. Then he cried:

"Piturín, come to me!"

Immediately the fish appeared in the moat.

"What do you want, my friend?" Piturín asked.

"First, to thank you for all that you have done for me; and then to ask you to fill this moat with the biggest waves of the sea, and to-morrow let those waves wash back into place all the earth my good spade has removed."

Instantly the water in the moat began to ripple, and then to heave itself up into great, mountainous waves; and the little fish disappeared as Gonzalito thanked it again.

Now he took the magic drum and, putting the stick on it, said very rapidly three times:

"Tap, rattatap-tap!"

Scarcely had he said the last word when the little instrument gave forth a volume of music that sounded as if a million drums were beating. The frightened people of Three Stars jumped from their beds and rushed to the wall to see what this noise could be. And thus they helped Gonzalito to defeat the large army of the enemy; for when Etnu's generals heard the drumbeats and then the vast number of men rushing to the walls of the city, they thought the citizens of Three Stars were planning a surprise attack. They gave orders to their armies to fall upon the city at once; but the night was dark and the soldiers could not see the moat—which had not been there at sunset; so they rushed headlong into the deep water and were swallowed up by the big

waves. Thus all the armies of King Etnu perished; and the next day the waves washed the earth back into place and the moat disappeared as though it had never been.

The jubilant people again acclaimed Gonzalito a great hero who had freed their lovely city from its enemies; and the King called him to the palace to present him with the hand of the Princess.

"This is the most valuable thing I have to give you for all you have done for us," the King said. "Take my daughter; to no one would I give her so willingly."

Gonzalito, overjoyed, fell at the feet of Wladimiro to express his immense gratitude, at the same time asking if the Princess would so honor him.

Jacinta did not need to answer; for her eyes told him that she was very happy indeed.

Pedro and Marta were sent for by the King, to join in celebrating the engagement. And how delighted they were! But they were not surprised; for they thought that nothing was too good for their boy.

"All of my ability to help you," Gonzalito said to the King, "I owe to the animals of the Enchanted Forest. And now I wish to prove to my lovely Princess that I am not unworthy of her. An old woman, over a hundred years old, who lives far out in the country, told me that she has heard her grandfathers tell of a time when, years and years ago, two

large cities stood where the Enchanted Forest is to-day. If that is true, undoubtedly all those poor animals are human beings who were put under an enchantment by some cruel sorcerer. Those animals have helped me; now I shall try to help them. To-morrow I shall go to the Enchanted Forest and call together all my animal friends there, and see if I can't learn what to do to disenchant them. The day that I succeed in freeing them I shall return to ask my Princess to marry me."

They could not help but approve of this new kind wish of Gonzalito's; and the following day, with many farewells and good wishes, he set out once more for the Forest, to enter upon new adventures in that place of magic.

III

THE ENCHANTED FOREST

(Sequel to "The Magic Gifts")

I

THE MAGIC CIRCLE

THE splendid sun of midday filtered between the leaves of a great oak in the Enchanted Forest when Gonzalito stopped beneath it and sat down on the violet bank where he had first seen Piturín. The little creek tumbled noisily over the stones and lost itself in the distance among a mass of purple violets and lacey ferns. It was a haunting spot, and Gonzalito sat there a long time before he spoke. Then:

"Piturín, come to me!"

he said.

At once the little fish raised its head above the crystal water.

"What do you wish?"

"To thank you once more; and to ask you a question. How is it that you, living here in the Forest, could hear my voice and come so quickly to me in the city, and could listen to the ministers when they walked beside the lake?"

"That may be surprising to you," the fish answered; "but it is very simple. You remember that I told you, the day you saved me, that you must be

near the water if you wished to call me. Although I live in the Forest, the streams here connect underground with the sea, and thus I can swim there easily. When you went to Three Stars, I spent most of my time there—I wanted to be where I could help you in case of need. For the same reason, the little bluebird often flew to the city, in order to answer more quickly if you should call. You see, you did not have to wait long for us, because we were always near you. And now tell me: Has anything happened? Why have you come back to this unfortunate Forest?"

"I shall return here within an hour; and then I will tell you."

"All right," said Piturín; and plunged beneath the water.

Gonzalito watched the ripples as the fish swam away; and then he took out the blue feather and, kissing it, said:

"O little bird, with breast of blue,
O little bird, with heart so true,
Come, come, I pray,
Do not delay,
Fly quickly here, I beg of you;
Little bird!"

He waited three minutes; and then the bird came flying quickly through the air and alighted on a bush near by.

"I should like to have a meeting of all the animals that have helped me," Gonzalito explained. "Will you be my messenger, little bird, asking them to come here to this creek?"

"I fly at once!" the bluebird trilled, and was gone in a twinkling.

Less than an hour had passed when Gonzalito heard the animals approaching through the thick woods. One after another they came—the graceful deer, the noble lion, the white dove, the good bears, the gentle little bird, the gracious Piturín, who raised his head above the water of the creek, and, last of all, the black beetle. They formed a circle around Gonzalito, all trying to express their friendship by wagging their tails or flapping their wings; as the poor beetle had neither tail nor wing to wave, he lay on his back and wiggled his feet. Gonzalito was much touched by these expressions of friendship.

"My dear friends," he said, "I have called you, first, to thank you, for never can I thank you enough; and, second, to show you that my gratitude will be expressed in more than words. I am sure, my friends, that you are not what you appear to be—in other words, that you are under some sorcerer's spell. My greatest wish is to break this enchantment and return favor for favor; but in order to do this it is necessary for you to tell me in what way you can help me. I know that it will be a difficult,

and perhaps dangerous, undertaking; but I shall accomplish it—if you will help me by telling me truly all that has happened to you."

The lion looked at the bears; and the bears looked at the deer; and the deer looked at the bluebird; and thus their secret consultation passed all round the magic circle until it came back to the lion again. He acted as spokesman.

"You have guessed right: we are not what we appear," he said. "For two hundred years we have been enchanted, and we had lost all hope of being saved."

"Two hundred years! How is it that in such a long time nobody has tried to help you?" Gonzalito wanted to know.

"Few people have dared enter the Enchanted Forest; and among those few you are the first one in whom we had enough confidence to tell our secret. For if any one should attempt to free us, and fail, then all hope for us would forever be lost."

"I shall not fail!" Gonzalito said staunchly. "Tell me what I must do."

"First you must know what happened. Two hundred years ago, here where the Enchanted Forest now stands were two powerful cities. In the most beautiful of these was the palace of the Fairy Dulcinda, whom everybody loved for her great kindness, to the poor as well as to the rich. Among the many gifts which the Queen of the Fairies had bestowed

upon Dulcinda was that of being able to make beautiful any one whom she chose—provided it was not some one who was being punished by the Fairy Queen. Everybody in both cities, of course, called upon Dulcinda to be godmother to the baby son or daughter, begging her to bestow upon the baby the gift of great beauty; and, being so kind, the good Dulcinda never refused.

"One day this lovely Fairy, who was herself the most beautiful thing you can imagine, was walking in her garden of roses. She wore a dress of gossamer web that shimmered with the colors of the rainbow as the sunshine lingered on it; and its fringe of iris perfumed the whole city with the fragrance of their white and purple petals.

"That afternoon, unluckily, there came to visit Dulcinda, the Fairy Rencorosa and her son, Prince Vengativo. This Fairy was short and very fat; and her slanting eyes, her immense mouth, and her large nose made her round and purplish-red face a perfect model of ugliness. Vengativo was just like his mother, only perhaps more ugly even. It seems that these two had once been as beautiful as their neighbors, but because of some wickedness the Fairy Queen had deprived them of their beauty.

"On this afternoon, when they saw the overwhelming loveliness of Dulcinda, they were filled with envy, and a cruel plan at once jumped into Rencorosa's mind.

"'Dear,' she said, sitting with Vengativo in the garden on a marble bench surrounded with fragrant flowers, 'even though our wish to see you is always great, our visit to-day has especial interest. I have heard of the gift that our good Queen has given you, and knowing that you never refuse a request, I have come with my son to beg that you free us from this unjust ugliness, returning to us our lost beauty.'

"'I cannot do that,' Dulcinda replied. 'Our Queen has prohibited my using this gift upon any one who is suffering punishment inflicted by her; if I go against her wishes she will take from me not only this but all my other gifts.'

"'But the Queen knows you so well,' Rencorosa insisted, 'that she would pardon one little disobedience and admire your goodness of heart.'

"'I am very sorry, but I cannot oblige you.'

"'Think well, my lady!' threatened Vengativo, who till that moment had not spoken. 'Our power is in every way greater than yours. If you refuse to do what we ask, our vengeance will be frightful. We will leave you now, and in fifteen days we will return for your answer.'

"The mother and son departed then, in their carriage of lizard-skin drawn by six horrible toads.

"As this conversation had taken place in the garden, some laborers heard it, and soon it was known all over the two cities. Dulcinda was much loved by the inhabitants of both cities, and they at once called

a meeting, with Sir Lion de Quevedo at their head, and agreed to defend the good Dulcinda from the wicked Rencorosa."

At this point in the tale, the lion paused a moment, as if quite overcome.

II

THE GREAT GIFT

AFTER a moment of silence, the lion continued his story.

"Fifteen days afterward, as threatened, the ugly Fairy and her son returned to have their beauty restored by Dulcinda. On entering the outskirts of the city, the lizard-skin carriage, drawn by its big toads, fell into a moat which had been dug by the citizens and covered over with dry branches. Rencorosa, you may be sure, was furious; but she and her son climbed out of the water; and then found themselves facing a strong wall, which they could not pass. With her magic jet wand, Rencorosa quickly drew the carriage out of the moat and changed it into a winged dragon, breathing fire from its mouth and nose as it flew with the Fairy and her son over the improvised wall. On touching the ground, the dragon disappeared, and in its place was the carriage with the six ugly toads.

"At the palace of Dulcinda, the wicked Rencorosa lost not a moment in asking her question:

" 'Are you going to grant what we wish?'

" 'Never! I shall call the Fairy Queen and she will protect me against you!'

"Dulcinda raised her little coral wand, meaning to wave it in the air. But Vengativo threw himself upon her, grabbed the wand, and thus left her wholly in their power.

" 'Until the day that you grant us our beauty, you will be our prisoner,' Rencorosa said. 'And as to the inhabitants of these two cities who dared interfere with me, just see what will happen!'

"Saying this, the cruel Rencorosa drew a circle in the air with her jet rod, muttering some mysterious words. Immediately the buildings in the cities fell with a terrific noise, as if there had been a violent earthquake; an instant later no vestige of a city remained; all was a tangle of wild forest. Then Rencorosa turned to her horrible toads.

" 'My sons, be gone!' she commanded.

"With lightning speed, the six toads hopped about the forest, spitting venom at the inhabitants, who stood immovable where they had been when Rencorosa's destruction fell upon them. Each one upon receiving the poison of the toads was turned into some animal, retaining the disposition, good or bad, that he had as a human. . . . Thus the spider from

whose web you saved the poor beetle was once a cruel man who showed no mercy to any one.

"Rencorosa, when she saw us all transformed into animals, cried furiously:

" 'And now, so that your punishment may be the greater, you shall not grow one hour older while you are under my enchantment. If the time ever arrives—and I don't expect it to—when some one breaks this spell, you will be just the age you are today. The only one who knows how to free you is Dulcinda, my prisoner, whom you will never see again. In losing her coral wand she has lost all her power and never can escape from me. Moreover, to be doubly sure, I shall make her dumb, so she cannot speak. Now, don't think that because time will not pass for you, you will escape from death. Oh, no! You will not die of old age, very true; but you will not be free from a violent death.' "

The lion on reaching this point interrupted his tale a moment to say to Gonzalito:

"From what I have just told you, you can understand what it would mean to us if you should succeed. Nothing that we have done for you can compare with this great gift that you propose to give to us—our human forms. But to continue:

"Vengativo grabbed in his powerful arms the dainty Dulcinda and carried her to the lizard-skin carriage, which disappeared rapidly as soon as the

three were inside. From that day to this we have not seen our lovely Fairy. Surely she is a prisoner or she would come to disenchant us; for only she knows what it is necessary to do."

The lion dropped two sad tears, which, when they touched the ground, turned into two blood-red roses.

"I loved Dulcinda," he said simply.

"There is one thing that seems strange to me," Gonzalito declared. "Why is it that the Fairy Queen does not help Dulcinda? Surely she has noticed her absence in all these two hundred years!"

"In the Fairy world time scarcely exists. Two hundred years is about as two days to you. Then, the Queen thinks that Dulcinda has the coral wand to call her whenever she is needed; she does not know that Vengativo stole it."

"I thought that the Fairy Queen knew everything that happened."

"Perhaps you are right; and in this case she is merely trying to prove the loyalty of Dulcinda."

"What great joy would be mine if I could free her from her imprisonment and you from your enchantment!" exclaimed Gonzalito. "But to do this you must tell me where I can find Dulcinda, and what I must do to get to her."

"Many years ago an eagle flew over this Forest and dropped at my feet a piece of parchment," the lion said. "I picked it up at once and read this: 'Dear Sir Lion, Dulcinda has not forgotten you.

The day that you find a human being brave and good and intelligent enough to save us, send him to me and I will tell him what to do. First of all, he must find for me the coral wand which Rencorosa has hidden. I am shut in the tower of a castle that is built on the highest of the mountains that form the Rocks of Romestal.' "

"I shall start at once!" cried Gonzalito, jumping up. "However long and dangerous the way may be, I shall succeed. Besides, I have your magic gifts to help me.'

"Unfortunately they will be of no use to you in this case. We have no power in anything having to do with Rencorosa. Perhaps you will find more useful this new gift which we shall give you. Lie down on the ground!"

Gonzalito did so, and the lion said solemnly:

"Brother animals, we will give to him the Great Gift, the Science of the Sciences."

The dove cooed a few low notes, and Gonzalito fell into a sound sleep.

While he slept the animals talked to him briefly, tapping his forehead and his mouth and his ears with their feet; and when, after an hour, he awoke, the lion explained what they had done.

"We have given you the power to talk with every kind of animal in its own language; this may prove useful to you. Go now, and may the Fairy Queen give you her protection!"

Gonzalito said good-by to his good animal friends and started joyously on his way to find the castle of Rencorosa.

III

THE LAND OF THE DWARFS

AFTER walking for fifteen days, Gonzalito arrived at the end of the kingdom of Three Stars, and on stopping at a village to rest and renew his store of provisions, he asked a little old man who sat in the sun at the door of his hut:

"Good man, could you tell me which way I should go to reach the Rocks of Romestal?"

"Ah, sir! Do not be so foolish as to go there. Many have gone; but none has returned. It is necessary to cross the Land of the Dwarfs and that of the Giants; and if by a great miracle you should escape with your life from one of these countries you perish in the other. You are very young, and I should not like to see you go to sure death."

"Oh, I am not afraid. I go on a good mission, and nothing will harm me."

The old man reluctantly, then, told Gonzalito the way to the Rocks of Romestal; and Gonzalito gave him a handful of gold money which quite delighted him.

Three days later Gonzalito arrived at a narrow, muddy creek; and this, he knew, marked the boundary line to the Land of the Dwarfs. Without hesitating he waded across; but scarcely had he taken twenty steps upon the other side when he was surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of Dwarfs, who were only about as high as his knees. With marvelous quickness they had him bound, hand and foot, and were running with him across the fields. At last they laid him down in front of their chief, who was a hideous, wicked looking fellow.

"But what harm have I done?" asked Gonzalito; at the same time giving thanks in his heart to the good Solón, with whom he had worked for five years and who had taught him the language of every country.

"According to our laws," answered the chief, "any one forfeits his life who dares enter our land without written permission from His Majesty, Pulgarcin III."

"But I did not know your law," pleaded Gonzalito. "Will you not be merciful enough to spare me?"

"Our treasury is almost empty. If by to-morrow you have for us here five million escudos, we will free you; otherwise we will kill you."

With these words, Gonzalito was shut into a long, damp prison and left alone.

With his head between his hands, he thought sadly of his parents, of the lovely Princess, and of all his

animal friends who now would wait in vain for their liberty. Five million escudos by morning!

A small noise that he heard somewhere near him caused him to raise his head; and there in a corner of his cell he saw two little mice playing with a straw from his mattress. In order to forget his sadness Gonzalito began to listen to their conversation. One was saying to the other:

"What a pity that nice young man does not know our language! If he only could understand us, we could tell him what you and I discovered last night. You know what I mean—the secret chamber underneath this prison, where the Sultan Ali-Baba, who died about a hundred years ago, hid his treasure. If this young man would only lift the square stone under the head of his mattress he would find the stairs that lead to the secret chamber."

"Yes," the other mouse answered, "and think of all the money old Ali-Baba hid! There must be ten million escudos at least!"

How thankful Gonzalito was to his good friends of the Forest for having given him this great gift of understanding the animals.

When, the following day, the Dwarfs came dancing in to kill him, he called for their chief.

"Yesterday," he said, "you promised to give me my liberty if I would have for you five million escudos. I will give you much more than that if

you will guarantee that I shall have no further trouble in your kingdom."

The chief, astonished and incredulous, took a mulberry leaf and made on it some queer marks and then gave it to Gonzalito for a passport.

"Now where is the money?" he asked roughly.

Gonzalito pushed aside the mattress and, with his knife, pried up the square flagstone, leaving uncovered before the amazed eyes of the Dwarfs the underground chamber piled high with gold and precious stones.

"You are free," the chief grunted.

He did not have to say it twice; for Gonzalito set out as fast as he could go, not even stopping for shelter when a furious rainstorm came up.

While the sentinels at the gates were examining his mulberry passport, he heard one of them exclaim:

"How happy we would be if we only had sentry-boxes, where we could get in out of the rain!"

IV

THE LAND OF THE GIANTS

A FEW days afterward Gonzalito arrived at the country of the Giants. Hiding among the trees and shrubs he slipped past the sentinels unseen; and he was just congratulating himself when

he was suddenly grabbed up by a monster fifteen feet high who gave the alarm. Instantly ten Giant warriors came running up. Taking him in their immense arms as if he were a feather, they carried him far away from the city and tied him to a tree which stood at the foot of a mountain.

"Who has permitted you to get this far?" thundered one of the Giants, when Gonzalito was tightly bound.

"Sir, I did not know that I should not enter your country."

"Any one who dares to set foot in the Land of the Giants without the written consent of the High Council forfeits his life!"

"Forgive me. I did not mean to offend you. Tell me what I can do to gain my liberty."

The Giants consulted among themselves for a few minutes.

"If to-morrow you have here for us a thousand steel lances which we need for our warriors, we will give you your life and your liberty."

"But, sirs, I am tied; how can I go to look for them?"

"Do you think that you can find them? Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho!" (When the Giants laughed the mountains trembled.) "Well, we will untie you if you will swear that you will not try to escape."

"I swear."

"Take care that you do not break that oath! You

"HE WAS SUDDENLY GRABBED UP BY A MONSTER FIFTEEN FEET HIGH"

would be seen by the sentinels, and it would go badly with you."

When the Giants left him, Gonzalito sat at the foot of the tree, thinking sadly of his misfortunes. Two linnets were perched in the branches above him, and unconsciously he began to listen to their chirping. Imagine his surprise to hear one of them saying:

"What do you think, brother, about the task the Giants have given this poor fellow? It is impossible for him to be saved."

"Not so impossible as you think; for there is help very near here. What a pity that he does not know our language! We could tell him that this grove is one of the many entrances to the forges of Vulcan, and if he gave three knocks on top of that black rock, Vulcan would come to him at once."

Gonzalito jumped up quickly and in a twinkling had climbed the hill until he reached the only black rock he saw. With a stone which he grabbed up he gave three loud knocks. The rock rolled aside at once, and in the opening beneath it appeared a huge and horrible looking man, carrying in his hand a hammer and a pair of tongs.

"Who has dared to call me?" he growled in a deep voice that rolled up and down the mountainsides like thunder.

"An unfortunate man who needs your help," Gonzalito said humbly. "If you were so good as to forge me, to-night, a thousand lances of steel, I

would do for you, in return, anything that you might ask me."

"An agreement!" bellowed Vulcan. Pointing to an immense forest that extended along the other side of the mountain, he added: "I need wood to feed my furnaces. If in two hours you cut down all those trees for me, before sunrise you shall have here by this rock the thousand lances."

Giving a ponderous leap, Vulcan disappeared below, and the black rock rolled back into place.

Gonzalito slid back down the hill, as much discouraged as when the Giants left him.

"What good did it do me to learn about Vulcan," he thought gloomily, "when now I can never get the lances. Even though I spent a whole month at it, I couldn't cut down all those trees!"

As he sat once more beneath the tree, he saw two ants carrying between them a heavy burden, but there were so many stones and twigs in their way that they had difficulty in getting around them. Gonzalito stooped quickly and cleared a path for them.

"How kind this young man is!" one of the ants exclaimed. "And how sad he is! I heard his conversation with Vulcan. If he only could understand my language I could tell him that if he were to dig beneath this tree he would find something to help him. A magician I know hid here a marvelous mole, with silver wings and a golden tooth. In a second

this mole can destroy the largest roots in the world, if you only show him where and say to him:

"Destroy for me, O mole most rare,
With tooth of gold and wings so fair,
The tree that stands so proudly there!"

Gonzalito thanked the little ants and, leaving them open-mouthed with amazement at hearing him speak their language, he began to dig vigorously. Surely enough, hidden away among the roots of the tree, he found the little mole which the ant had described; and taking it gently into his hands, he pointed to the forest and repeated the magic verse.

The mole spread its silver wings and sailed toward the forest; then there followed the noise of the falling trees, one after another so rapidly that it seemed but one long, continuous sound.

In much less than two hours not a single tree remained; and the little mole flew back to its hiding-place. Gonzalito covered it over carefully, and then hurried to the black rock and knocked three times.

"Sir," he said, when Vulcan appeared, "I have carried out my part of the agreement, and now I have come to claim the lances."

Vulcan saw with astonishment that the forest had indeed been cut down, to the last tree. Giving two claps of his hands, he looked up at the clouds and muttered some words in a low voice; instantly from out of the sky came a furious hurricane that lifted

the tree-trunks, whirled them to the cavern, and dropped them within. When the last one had disappeared, the wind subsided as quickly as it had come up. Vulcan now gave five knocks with his hammer, and immediately there appeared before him some hideous giants, each one having only one eye in his forehead.

"Cyclops," he ordered, "bring me at once the thousand lances for this young man!"

When the first streak of day came over the mountain-top, a thousand steel lances glittered beside the black rock.

The chief of the Giants was amazed to see them; but he could only keep his promise and give Gonzalito a passport that would assure his safety until he reached the boundary of their kingdom.

When the sentinels at the gates were examining Gonzalito's passport—a piece of palm leaf—he heard one of them exclaim to the other:

"How happy we would be if they would only give us helmets, to keep the strong rays of the sun off our heads!"

V

THE ROCKS OF ROMESTAL

GONZALITO did not lose much time in reaching the foot of the mountain on whose summit stood the magnificent castle of the Fairy Rencorosa

with its glistening marble towers pointing upward to the sky. But there still remained a long distance for him to cover before he reached the castle. So, after a short rest, he set out gaily to climb the steep mountain. The sides of it were almost straight up and down, with creeks and wide fissures running zig-zag through the rocks. Gonzalito waded or jumped the creeks and climbed down and up the fissures, without stopping, having always before him as a guide the glistening white castle which shone at the top of the mountain.

After three hours of hard climbing, the rough hill-side ended in a sort of platform, on which the castle of Rencorosa was built. Here Gonzalito hid himself among the brambles to wait for the night-time, as he did not want to be seen. When darkness came, he crept out of his hiding-place and slipped around the castle with great caution. Fortunately, the moon was shining; so that he was able to see, in the very top of the highest tower, a beautiful young woman, leaning over her small balcony and crying bitterly. As her tears fell to the ground they turned into blood-red roses. When he saw this, and recalled that the very same thing had happened when the lion in the Forest cried, Gonzalito had no doubt at all that he had found Dulcinda, the prisoner of the wicked Rencorosa.

Quickly plucking a large, smooth leaf, he wrote on it this message:

"The lion of the Enchanted Forest has sent me. I have come to do everything possible to break their enchantment and to set you free."

Then, rolling the leaf round a stone, he threw it toward the balcony; and it went so surely that it fell right at Dulcinda's feet. She picked it up hastily and read the note; then, radiant with happiness, she leaned again over the balcony. But this time her tears were tears of joy, and as they fell they formed a ladder of roses, by which Gonzalito easily climbed to her window.

He told Dulcinda all that had happened; but the kind Fairy, made mute by Rencorosa, was unable to answer him. She could write, though, and Gonzalito soon read these words, which she scratched on the leaf with a pin:

"Thank you for your kindness; but I am helpless —as you will be—until I recover the coral wand which Vengativo snatched from me. With the return of that I will regain my power, and then I can tell you what must be done to disenchant the animals of the Forest. I do not know where the wand is; but I think it cannot be far from here."

"I shall not leave the castle without finding it!" Gonzalito declared firmly. "I shall begin the search at once!"

As the night was nearing its end, Gonzalito hurried down the ladder of roses, which disappeared the minute he touched the ground.

The food which he had brought with him was all gone, but fortunately he found fruit to eat that day; and he nibbled at it while he planned how he should search the castle for the coral wand. Very greatly he lamented the fact that he could not use the lion's hair to make himself invisible.

He slipped in among a patch of briars, to hide until night-time, and as he crept along he did not see a large opening which had been covered over with leaves and branches. The next instant he was falling, down, down, down, to the bottom of a deep cavern. Bruised and sore, he sat up to look about him. He saw that he was in an enormous cañon through which a great torrent of water rushed and roared a few feet from where he had fallen.

"How will I ever get out of here?" he thought. "It is impossible to climb the walls, for they are as smooth as glass all the way to the top."

His bumps and bruises hurt so much that he lay back again and closed his eyes; and before he knew it he was sound asleep.

Gonzalito was awakened by a hoarse cry somewhere near him:

"Cro-ak! Cro-ak!"

And there at his feet was a little frog.

Before Gonzalito could speak, he heard another frog call to it:

"Reré, how is it you are out so early?"

"Oh, Bibí, the old toad was called to the castle by

Rencorosa; so I slipped out to look at the sky and get some air."

"What a sad life you must pass at the bottom of the torrent! Why won't the old toad let you hop all over the cañon, as the rest of us do? Where did you come from?"

"I am not really a frog, friend Bibí."

"Then what are you?"

"I may not tell you that."

Bibí was curious now.

"I will keep your secret, really, truly," she promised.

"Then I will tell you gladly, little friend. I am the magic coral wand of the good Fairy Dulcinda. Rencorosa, to be sure I shall never be found, has turned me into a frog; and then, to be doubly sure, she has put me down here, and set to watch over me the most horrid of the six toads that draw her carriage. This old toad keeps me at the bottom of the torrent."

"And is there no way you can be returned to Dulcinda?"

"Yes; one. But that is almost impossible. It is by killing my jailer with a red-striped rock that is hidden somewhere in these waters."

"Oh, I know where the red-striped rock is!" cried Bibí. "It is guarded by that monster spider who has his web stretched between those reeds."

"If I could only catch the spider!"

"Don't dare go near it! It is a ferocious animal that devours everything that comes within its reach. . . . Run, Reré! Here comes the old toad!"

Gonzalito raised himself slowly and cautiously, so as not to make a noise, and crept nearer and nearer to the giant spider. What he should do when he got there he had not fully decided. As he approached he heard the spider groaning sadly.

"This horrid red-striped stone," he was saying to himself, "will break my beautiful web with its great weight. Is there any one in the world brave enough to kill the wicked old toad, who compels me to keep the stone as a punishment for my contempt for him? With real joy would I help to crush his old head!"

Gonzalito could hardly believe he had heard aright. Where he had expected to find a ferocious enemy, he had an ally!

"I am here to kill the toad," he whispered, close to the spider.

"What! You can speak my language? Come here. Don't be afraid!"

"Afraid! I don't know the word!"

"Good! Here, crawl under my web between the reeds and get the stone."

Gonzalito did so, quickly.

"And now," he asked, "how shall I get to the bottom of the torrent?"

"That is easy. Push aside those reeds and look!"

Gonzalito saw before him a large crevice. The

giant spider began quickly to weave a strong thread, which he dropped like a rope ladder into the abyss.

"Climb down this," he said.

The young adventurer slid down easily, and found himself in an enormous cave, where the water did not come. But he did not have much time to look about; for scarcely had he touched the ground when he heard a harsh, "*Cro-ak! Cro-ak!*" followed by a sweeter, more musical, voice; and the old toad entered, in front of Reré. Gonzalito rushed at his victim and threw the red-striped rock, with such good aim that the toad rolled over instantly, quite dead.

Reré, giving a glad leap, jumped into Gonzalito's hands; and what was his astonishment and joy to find himself holding, not a frog, but the magic coral wand! He hurried up the spider's ladder, carrying with him the dead toad, to prove that he had killed it. Then, thanking the good spider, he left him and hastened down the cañon.

By this time night was approaching again.

"Now how shall I get out of here?" Gonzalito said to himself. "Will Dulcinda think that I have abandoned her?"

A voice, which seemed to come from the magic wand, answered him.

"Do not forget that you have me in your hand, and that I have recovered my power to do anything that will help my sweet owner, for whose liberty you are working."

The night now had fallen and the earth was hidden in darkness.

"Precious wand, carry me to the room of Dulcinda!" Gonzalito exclaimed.

As the last word was uttered, he stood in Dulcinda's room in the tower, and she held in her hand the magic wand. With it she had recovered all her power and her speech.

"I owe you more than my life, Gonzalito, for you have given me my liberty. And now we will flee at once. Rencorosa can do nothing to me; but she is able to do you a great deal of harm."

Leaving the tower cautiously, they crept around the castle and came to the stables. Here Dulcinda chose two magnificent horses which could run almost with the speed of lightning and could go up or down the steepest precipices without stumbling or losing their speed.

Mounted on these horses they set out; but the Fairy stopped a moment when they reached the garden and with her wand drew a circle round a large white rose, which was so beautiful that it stood out among all the other flowers of the garden.

"What are you doing?" Gonzalito wanted to know.

"Asking the rose to make its perfume so strong that it will put to sleep for five days the entire castle. By that time we shall be in Three Stars, as our horses run like the wind. To the gallop, my friend!

On the way I will tell you how you can free the animals of the Enchanted Forest."

VI

THE WICKED FAIRY'S SECRET

WHEN the riders were some distance from Romestal, Dulcinda slowed down the horses a little, so that she might talk.

"First of all," she said, "you must know that to undo Rencorosa's enchantment, words or magic wands are of no avail. It is not easy for any one to suspect the only means powerful enough to be of service; but from what Rencorosa said when she was enchanting those dear people, I learned that to free them of her spell it is necessary to combine two widely different things. They will remain enchanted until some one *laughs* and *cries* at the same instant, beneath a large oak-tree which stands beside the little creek where you first met Piturín."

"Well, never would I have guessed that! But it seems very easy to accomplish. The trouble now is that we are at the Land of the Giants, and they will not let any one pass through."

"Do not worry. I can soon free you from their clutches."

"But we might lose several hours. As it is night-

time, only the sentinels will be on guard. If I only had two nice helmets for them, we would be saved."

"Is that all?"

The Fairy leaned over and touched with her coral wand the branches of a pine-tree that hung in their path. Two pine-cones fell to the ground, and immediately were transformed into two elegant helmets, of a size convenient for Giants. Gonzalito, delighted, grabbed them up and guarded them carefully until he reached the sentinels.

"When I passed here a few days ago," he said, presenting his gifts, "you were uncomfortable because of the strong rays of the sun. These helmets will protect your heads."

The sentinels were so happy to have what they so long had wanted that they let Gonzalito and the Fairy pass without question.

The following night found the two riders at the Land of the Dwarfs.

"Only the sentinels will be on guard here," said Gonzalito. "If I had two sentry-boxes, I am sure we could pass safely."

"That is very easy," responded Dulcinda; and touching with her magic wand two enormous stones she turned them instantly into beautiful and commodious sentry-boxes.

"Good-evening, my friends," Gonzalito said to the two Dwarfs who challenged him. "When I passed here a few days ago you were uncomfortable because

of the rain. These nice sentry-boxes will protect you."

He pointed to what had just been two large stones; and the Dwarfs, delighted, ran into their shelter, while Gonzalito and Dulcinda set out as fast as their lightning mounts could take them. By sunrise they had reached the kingdom of Three Stars.

"Soon we shall come to the end of our journey," said the Fairy, "and I have not yet asked you anything about your plans to free your enchanted friends of the Forest."

"I have not decided them completely, as yet. The Queen of the Fairies, who I am sure has been helping me, will make me think of some plan, and before a week passes the Enchanted Forest will have disappeared and in its place will stand the two beautiful cities. But tell me, dear Fairy, if there is any way in which Rencorosa's evil power can be taken from her, so that she may not do more harm?"

"There is one way only—to separate her from her son. Vengativo used his power in such ill ways that the Fairy Queen was forced to take it away from him. Then Rencorosa, furious at the Queen, gave Vengativo half of her power; and now their enchantment will not work unless they are together; for one half without the other half is powerless. You may be sure, though, that Rencorosa and Vengativo keep together always; and it would not be an easy matter to separate them."

VII

TEARS AND LAUGHTER

THREE days later the travelers entered the city of Three Stars. And how happy were Gonzalito's parents, the King, and the Princess, to see him returning with the beautiful Dulcinda! The King begged the Fairy to live at the palace; and she gladly agreed to do so. Many times they had to tell their story, for their audience never tired of listening to all the marvelous things that had happened.

On the night of their return, the King gave a sumptuous banquet in honor of the great hero and the lovely Fairy. And a few minutes before the guests sat down to the table a small thing happened which was to have an important influence over future events.

One of the invited guests was the Marquis of Tintura, a very old and ugly man whose one overwhelming desire was to look young. He dyed his mustache, he wore a wig, and every day he painted a rosebloom tint on his cheeks. Now it happened that this old Marquis was exceedingly fond of taking snuff.

As the time for the dinner arrived, the Marquis

went up to one of the servants and asked where his place would be at the table. When he learned that he must sit between Pedro and Marta he was furious. He was a proud old Marquis, and he did not think that one so noble as himself should be placed between two poor country people. And this he said, in no very gentle words.

Now, Gonzalito still adored his parents, and when he heard the haughty old man's remarks he planned to punish him.

The Marquis was given another place, and the dinner went off merrily. When the guests were leaving the banqueting-hall, Gonzalito managed to whisper a few words to the King; and shortly afterward Wladimiro invited all those present to come to a picnic luncheon to be held the following day in the Enchanted Forest.

The guests stared at the King in astonishment. In the Enchanted Forest! Why, no one ever put foot in that mysterious place! The King, however, seemed to be in earnest; and as nobody wanted his neighbor to think he was a coward, everybody accepted.

At the hour designated, dozens of carriages drew up at the entrance to the Enchanted Forest. Every invited guest was present. When they had dismounted, Gonzalito and the Princess led the procession into the mysterious woods, with the others following closely behind them, walking two by two; the

servants, carrying the hampers of food, brought up the rear.

They had not gone far before Gonzalito saw his little friend, the bluebird, among the branches of a thick pine-tree. He called to it softly and then stopped a moment, pretending to break off a sprig of the pine, but really to whisper a few words in the bird's ear.

Immediately the bluebird flew ahead and perched on the topmost branch of the large oak-tree which grew beside the little creek where Gonzalito had first met Piturín. Toward this oak-tree Gonzalito and the Princess now started; and after them came all the crowd. In less than a half-hour they arrived at the violet-covered banks of the little creek.

"Don't you think, Your Majesty," Gonzalito said to the King, "that this is a splendid place for the luncheon, here under this gigantic oak-tree?"

"Admirable!" agreed the King; and ordered the servants to serve the luncheon.

The guests formed in groups beneath the great oak; and the Marquis, who arrived tired and dusty, sat down upon the grass and quickly opened his loved box of snuff. The powder must have been very strong—and perhaps Gonzalito and one of the servants knew why!—because scarcely had he taken the first sniff when he began to sneeze violently. He reached for his handkerchief, and was surprised to find that it was not in his pocket.

"Careless servants!" he exclaimed in irritation.

Gonzalito courteously offered him his handkerchief; and the Marquis quickly accepted it, and, shaking it unfolded, hurriedly buried his face in it. A moment later every one screamed with laughter. The painted and powdered face of the haughty old Marquis was streaked with soot; the pink of his rose-bloom cheeks peeped out between smears and blotches of black. The King laughed, and his guests laughed; even the servants lost their dignity and roared. But the Marquis did not laugh. He was furious. He jumped up, shaking his fist at them; but at that instant the bluebird swooped down and, catching his wig in its beak, flew upward with it and disappeared among the tree-tops.

The alarmed Marquis, forgetting all his haughtiness, began bobbing up and down like a jumping-jack, trying to catch the bird. With his face smeared with black, and his wig flying through the air, he made such a ridiculous spectacle that the people laughed until the tears dropped from their eyes. They actually had "laughed till they cried."

The moment the first tear fell, a deafening thunder-crash sounded above and around them; and an instant later the Enchanted Forest was no more, and where it had been stood the two large cities, looking precisely as they had looked the day Rencorosa destroyed them. The enchanted animals at the same

instant regained their human forms, and from all sides came cries of great joy.

Sir Lion de Quevedo, a fine and distinguished looking young man, rushed up and threw his arms around Gonzalito, and then turned to Dulcinda, who blushingly gave him her hand. (This splendid fellow had been the lion of the Forest.)

Piturín's little creek was now a crystal stream that flowed through the garden of Dulcinda's palace; and the Fairy invited all the guests to spend the afternoon with her in her lovely rose-garden and then repair to the big marble palace for tea. They accepted gladly—all but the furious Marquis. He called a carriage and quickly departed for his castle.

VIII

FIRE AND WATER

ON reaching the door of Dulcinda's white palace, the guests heard a swishing noise in the air and, looking up, saw with terror Rencorosa flying toward them on a large dragon which blew sheets of fire from its nose and its mouth. Behind Rencorosa, sat Vengativo, astride the dragon's tail.

Dulcinda quickly waved her coral wand, calling to the Queen of the Fairies. Instantly there descended from the clouds a brilliant carriage cut from one

solid diamond, and drawn by two flame-colored eagles. From this carriage stepped the most beautiful creature in all the world. Her gown, spun of the rays of the sun, shimmered like the rainbow; over her arm she carried a mantle woven of moonbeams and embroidered with threads of starlight.

Dulcinda knelt at her feet and told her all that had happened. Rencorosa and Vengativo, in the meantime, remained motionless with fright; and the guests stood gazing at the Fairy Queen, entranced by her dazzling beauty.

When Dulcinda finished her story, the Queen turned upon Rencorosa and Vengativo.

"Neither the punishment that I have given you," she said with a frown, "nor the loss of your beauty has had any effect upon you. You remain the same! In order that you may not cause more evil I now condemn you to a transformation that will separate you from each other forever. Rencorosa, because of your cold rancor, you shall be turned to water; Vengativo, because of your fiery vengeance, you shall become fire."

She touched them with her wand of pearls; and instantly the dragon, the evil Fairy, and her son disappeared.

"I have sent them beneath the earth, out of sight," the Queen said to Dulcinda, "where they will carry on a continual struggle to unite themselves. But whenever they come together, the water will quench

the fire; the heat of the fire will evaporate the water."

The Fairy Queen now turned to Dulcinda.

"I have known everything that has happened to you," she said; "but I did not interfere, because I wished to prove your loyalty. Now that you have come through the trial triumphantly, I shall reward you in any way that you ask."

"Dear Queen," Dulcinda begged, "grant to Sir Lion the powers and privileges of the Fairies; so that he may be as great as I."

"As you wish!"

The Queen touched Sir Lion with her magic wand.

"Thank you!" he cried. "Now I may marry the lovely Dulcinda!"

Gonzalito was surrounded by his animal friends of the Forest, who now, of course, were no longer animals. Piturín and the bluebird turned out to be two rich young lords; the beetle was an eminent lawyer; the bears were the Duke and Duchess of Osian; the deer was a distinguished general; and the gentle dove was a beautiful young princess.

Gonzalito and Jacinto, and Sir Lion and Dulcinda were married that same afternoon, the Fairy Queen remaining to bless the weddings; and for fifteen days there was great feasting and dancing and rejoicing throughout the whole kingdom of Three Stars.

When, a few years later, King Wladimiro died,

Gonzalito ascended the throne; and with Jacinto to advise and help him, he made a model king, loved by all his subjects.

IV

THE TINKLING LAUGH

I

THE TWO SISTERS

THE ruler of the powerful Kingdom of the Sapphires—Leonardo V, valiant, noble, loved by all his subjects—had two beautiful daughters: Elena, sixteen, and Rosa, fifteen. The two sisters were alike in that they possessed extraordinary beauty, but in every other way they differed as completely as day and night. Gentle Elena was a model of kindness and sweetness; Rosa, with an ungovernable and violent disposition, permitted herself to be utterly dominated by envy.

Elena's godmother was the Fairy of Happiness; and among the many gifts which the Fairy had bestowed upon her was a laugh so delicious, so enchanting that as it left her beautiful lips it resembled nothing so much as a cascade of exquisite harmonies.

Now Rosa, even from a very small child, had been jealous of her sister; and this jealousy in time grew into bitter envy. She could not forgive Elena for having been born first, and so being heir to the throne; she could not forgive her for having a Fairy for a godmother when her own godmother was only

a Queen; and, above all, never could she forgive her for possessing that bewitching laugh that was the admiration and the enchantment of all who knew her. And as envy, like all other evil passions, if not controlled from the beginning will later dominate the will, you will see what it did to Rosa, who did not control it in time.

Elena was so beautiful, so gracious, and so charitable that the entire kingdom adored her, the poor and the rich alike; for among them all, equally, she showered kindness and smiles, until even the inanimate things appeared to acquire life in order to be able to love her. When she went into the garden the white poppies changed color! The pleasure they felt at having her near them caused them to become scarlet with happiness. The buds of the carnations swelled themselves until they broke into their glory of blossom. The tiny bluebells, caressed by the wind, swayed their corollas, tinkling a sweet melody. The daisies smiled their happiness as they cuddled against the climbing jasmines. The geraniums turned a bright crimson; and the white and purple iris nodded their exquisite blossoms, as if they wished to give her welcome. And the violets and the gardenias and the roses united in exhaling their richest perfumes, to offer them to their lovely Princess.

If the people, the court, and even the flowers idolized her, imagine how great was her father's love!

Only one person remained insensible to the enchantment of Elena, only one person hated her—the Princess Rosa, who returned the affection and sweet attentions of her sister with the blackest ingratitude. But Rosa showed nothing of her overwhelming envy and hatred; although she was only fifteen, she knew well how to hide her feelings.

The only one in all the kingdom who suspected Rosa was Fernando, Elena's knight and special protector. No one knew anything about Fernando or where he came from. When he was very young he was found one bitter wintry night, half dead with hunger and cold, at the gates of the royal palace. The good King took him under his protection, giving him to Elena first as a page and making him later a knight. Whenever any one asked him about his early life he always answered that he could remember nothing. Fernando felt for Elena a respect and liking that soon turned to adoration; and when he discovered Rosa's jealousy he doubled his vigilance as Elena's protector, for he was tormented by a cruel presentiment.

One night when Fernando was walking in the garden he saw, crossing cautiously in front of the palace, a shadow, or what appeared to be a shadow by the agility with which it slipped along without making a noise. Astonished, he recognized the Princess Rosa. He decided to follow her at a distance so that he would not be seen.

Rosa crossed the garden, then the park, jumped over the low mud wall, and walked rapidly along the road leading into the country. The moon was shining brightly, and Fernando, slipping along from bush to bush, never lost sight of the Princess. Soon, however, a dark cloud crossed the moon, threatening a storm; and Rosa, fearing that the tempest would come suddenly and furiously, hastened her steps. As she had reached a place where the road forked, Fernando could not see, in the pitch darkness, which path she took, nor was he able without a light to see her footprints in the road.

Sad and dejected, he turned back to the palace, resolved to redouble his vigilance, but keeping quiet about what he had seen. He was sure that Rosa would deny it, and the King would then feel compelled to dismiss him from the court.

Notwithstanding this, if the faithful Fernando had been able even to suspect where Rosa had gone, he would not have kept silent.

A half-league from the palace there was a large uncultivated field belonging to a horrible little old woman who was so repulsive and so strange that everyone believed she was a Witch. Very few people knew her, and no one could say where she lived, for in all the field of tangled briars and thistles and weeds there was no sign of even a tiny hut. Some said that her home was hidden under a rock-pile in the middle of the field, but they merely guessed that,

for no one really knew. Several times the inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Sapphires tried to persuade the ugly old creature to leave their country: the rich offered her large sums of money, and the poor threatened to drive her out; but to the rich she refused, and when the poor gathered up sticks and stones and hurried to her field to carry out their threats they found that the thistles had grown so high and so thick that they formed an impassable wall. When they attempted to batter or cut their way through, the thorns reached out and pricked them with a poison that all but killed them.

So the old Witch continued to live undisturbed in her field of thistles.

II

WHAT ENVY DID

WHEN the Princess Rosa slipped out of the palace, it was for no other purpose than to find this horrid creature; for her envy was now stronger than her fear of the unknown Witch.

She arrived at last at the rock-pile in the middle of the field and with a trembling hand gave three knocks on the biggest stone. Immediately and without a sound it rolled aside and showed a large cavern. Rosa stepped inside this and saw before her a long

passage, brilliantly lighted by fireflies and glow-worms. She had gone too far now to turn back; so, still trembling, she followed the passage until it opened into a large round room, decorated with the strangest flowers she had ever seen. As she drew nearer, the flowers suddenly were turned into loathsome octopuses, whose tentacles, waving wildly about the room, threatened to strangle her.

In the center of the cave was the Witch's throne. This was nothing more than the skeleton of a donkey covered with the skin of a white bear, while all around it lay piles of bones, skulls, feathers, tails, and horns of different animals. Above the throne there was a canopy constructed of bats' wings decorated with lightning-bugs.

Seated on the throne was a frightful-looking old woman, dressed in cobwebs trimmed with peacock feathers and wearing a crown made of a hedgehog's quills, each stiff quill ending in the head of a snake.

"Who are you?" screamed the old Witch. "You who have dared to come into my home!"

For a moment Rosa's lips were sealed with terror; but, knowing that she could not now escape, she took a strong hold of herself and answered, looking straight into the Witch's eyes:

"I am Rosa, the daughter of the King—"

But scarcely had she begun to speak when all the snake-heads in the Witch's crown became alive and flopped themselves around with a frightful hissing,

their fiery tongues stuck out and their beady eyes glistening threateningly.

"I know who brought you!" the Witch exclaimed when she heard the snake-heads. "The representatives of Envy are telling me. If Anger had directed your footsteps, the heads of the reptiles would have remained immovable and instead the quills of the hedgehog would have become alive. Pride makes the peacock's feathers quiver; Greed causes the cobwebs in my gown to tremble as if they were blown by the wind. But we will come to the point. Whom do you envy?"

"My sister Elena," Rosa answered in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "I have heard that you are very powerful, and that by your magic you can do anything."

"And what is it you want me to do?"

"To rob Elena of her beautiful laugh. Only the belief that you can do it has given me the courage to come here."

"But I do nothing without being paid for it. How do you propose to pay me for my work?"

"Take this," stammered the Princess, giving the Witch a sack of gold which she had kept hidden under the long cloak she wore.

The Witch grabbed the sack greedily.

"It is very little," she complained. "I demand also the pearls which you have round your neck."

"Oh, ask *anything* else," Rosa begged in alarm.

"*Anything!* These belonged to my mother and I cannot part with them."

The Witch grinned hideously.

"It is too late for you to resist any demand I make," she said, and waved her hand to the octopuses.

Immediately their slimy tentacles came clutching toward Rosa, and she screamed in terror.

"Don't let them come near me! Please, please! I will do anything you say!"

She snatched the collar of pearls from her neck and handed it to the Witch.

"Very well," said the old woman. "You have paid me, and I feel inclined to do as you wish. I will grant your request the very first chance I get."

Rosa meant to thank her and leave the cave; but her great fright had taken away all her strength and she would have fallen to the ground if the Witch, jumping from her throne, had not touched her with her wand, saying:

"To the palace!"

Rosa felt herself being lifted by an invisible being who in a short time, with unbelievable speed, covered the distance to the palace and deposited her at the door of her own room.

The next morning, as a result of her frightful experience, the little Princess was ill; and when the King saw her cloak muddy and wet he asked what

had happened. Rosa answered that she had missed the pearl necklace given her by her mother and, not being able to sleep while it was lost, she had gone at midnight out into the garden to hunt for it, but, she was sorry to say, she had not found it anywhere.

The King immediately gave orders that all the servants of the palace should search the garden and the park for the pearl necklace of the little Princess.

Of course they did not find it.

III

THE WITCH'S PROMISE

A MONTH had passed. In the capital of the Kingdom of the Sapphires a great festival was being held in honor of the seventeenth birthday of the Princess Elena. From all the cities and villages came noblemen and laborers to participate in the rejoicing. In the palace were being entertained the Princes Roberto and Jorge, sons of two powerful Kings who were friends of Leonardo V.

That afternoon a choice performance was given on a raised platform in the royal park; and the King gave orders to the guards and the gate-keepers to let any one enter who chose, the poor as well as the rich, so that the entire population might join in the merrymaking.

The play began, and everybody was listening to it so intently, or else taking part in it, that no one noticed a little old woman wrapped in a long black cloak pass through the gates and mingle with the crowd. She made her way quietly to a place near the royal box; and still no one paid any attention to her.

One very amusing scene in the play made everybody shout with laughter. From Elena's ruby lips came the most delicious music. The Witch, on hearing it, gave one big leap, unbelievable in a woman of her age, and put her clawlike hand over the beautiful mouth of the Princess. Her action was so unexpected and so quick that no one could intercept her; only those nearby knew what had happened, even.

The old woman flew toward the gate; and the Princess, after her first fright, wished to make light of the matter, so that no one's pleasure would be interfered with.

"Father," she begged, "let the old creature go! The poor thing is mad, surely!"

She tried then to laugh; but, to her horror, she found that no sound would come from her lips. She threw herself into the arms of the King, and cried, amid bitter sobs:

"She has robbed me of my laugh!"

Quickly the news that some stupendous thing had happened to their favorite Princess spread among

the multitude and, at the order of the King, the whole population started running after the Witch.

The old woman, seeing herself in danger of being overtaken by the frenzied people, quickly opened one of her hands and waved it wildly in the air; then she disappeared, without any one being able to tell how or where. From her hand had flown a white butterfly, which was soon lost in the distance.

The rejoicing of the multitude turned into public grief; although the mob knew not what had really happened, and all the world was ignorant of the cause of the calamity. Only two people knew the truth.

When the Witch raised her hand to the mouth of the Princess, her black cloak fell open, showing Rosa's pearl necklace. Fernando and Elena saw it with the greatest astonishment; but both determined to keep silent—the lips of the one were sealed with respect, those of the other with charity. The only thing that Elena did was to draw nearer to Rosa, so that no one might hear her words, and whisper to her sadly:

"Oh, Rosa! I who love you so much! *Why* did you do this thing to me?"

Rosa gave a cry and fell to the floor in a faint. Too late she repented.

IV

THE FAIRY OF HAPPINESS

THAT night the King, his two daughters, and Prince Roberto and Prince Jorge were walking sadly in the garden. Elena and Rosa were silent, and the Princes were talking with the King about the events of the afternoon, when suddenly they saw the sky illumined with a great path of brilliant light, and coming down this path toward them a dainty chariot scattering such a soft radiance that it seemed made of a moonbeam. It was drawn by little white clouds shaped like swans and lambs. With its invisible wings, this precious little vehicle gently descended to the earth, and from it stepped the Fairy of Happiness. Her great beauty was enhanced by her magnificent dress, which radiated like the sun; encircling her forehead was a crown of shining stars interlaced with little bells of gold and silver which tinkled the most delicious music.

With a sweet smile, the Fairy turned to Elena.

"What good does it do you to have the Fairy of Happiness for a godmother," she asked, "if when you weep you do not call her to wipe away your tears? A sunbeam told me of your loss and of all that has happened; and as I love you very much I

did not wait for you to call me but came at once to comfort you. Do you know a Prince who is brave enough to go in search of the laugh of which the Witch has robbed you?"

Immediately Roberto and Jorge offered to undertake the search. They both loved the adorable Princess, and, more than that, Roberto was animated by gratitude. His father in a difficult moment had received great help from Leonardo. Jorge was actuated mainly by ambition; being the second son of a king, with little chance of reigning, he hoped that if he returned victorious, Elena might marry him as a reward, and so he would become ruler of the Kingdom of the Sapphires.

The Fairy seemed to be satisfied.

"I will tell you," she said, "all that I have been able to learn about the disappearance of Elena's laugh. As it is a magic laugh it must, before it returns to its original form, undergo four transformations, each one caused by an intense emotion. The terror of seeing itself caught by the Witch caused the first transformation, changing the laugh into a white butterfly—which the people saw fly from the Witch's hand when they were running after her. When the butterfly found itself free from those rough fingers that had imprisoned it, it flew away with such immense happiness that the force of its great joy caused it to change into its second form—a kiss—at the instant that it was poised over the open

mouth of one of the spectators who were here this afternoon.

"You know now, my Princes, that somewhere there exists a person who is the owner of the magic laugh of my godchild, and that its melodious sound has been converted into a kiss. If you should kiss that person, you would possess the treasure; and you should make all haste to return here; for there would remain but two other transformations, and if they should take place before the laugh was returned to Elena, her gift would be lost forever.

"I must not forget to tell you that while you are looking for this treasure of our lovely Princess, it is most necessary that you learn where it is hidden without revealing to any one the object of your search. If you should tell, it might reach the ears of the Witch, and she could then cause other injury to my godchild."

While the Fairy was speaking, Fernando slowly approached the King, and when she paused he fell upon his knees among the plants.

"Your Majesty, permit me also to go with Their Highnesses. I do not desire any recompense or reward whatever. The only thing that I wish is to serve my Princess. In order to save her one pain I would give my life willingly."

"I am sorry that I cannot grant your request," the King said gently. "You have heard that only a prince can find and return the laugh."

"I have never told you who I am," Fernando replied, "but now it is necessary."

Getting to his feet, he showed the King a miniature which he wore in a locket suspended from a chain round his neck, and which he had always kept hidden.

"Does Your Majesty know this portrait?"

"Ah! It is my unfortunate friend Alberto, the King of the Hortensias, who was kidnapped by his enemies and assassinated afterward with all his family."

"In that you are mistaken," Fernando said. "I am his youngest son—I have papers that will prove it, and I will show them to you. My father gave them to me when he was dying, telling me to come here and put myself under your protection. But, even though I was only a child, the pride of my race spoke louder than my reason, and I, the son of a king, not wishing to present myself as a poor beggar asking for alms, preferred to hide my name and earn my living with honorable work, before living on charity."

"Come to my arms, Fernando!" exclaimed the King. "You are a noble young man, worthy to vanquish every obstacle in the search for Elena's laugh."

Then, turning to all those present, who had been listening intently, the King embraced Fernando and said with great earnestness:

"It was not in vain that your father put his confidence in me; from to-day on I have one more child."

The Fairy now took from the garden a handful of sand, a branch of an oak-tree, and a rose, and touched them in turn with her wand. The first was changed into a sack of golden coins, the second into a strong sword, and the rose into a lute.

"I wish to make each of you a present that may help you in your undertaking," she said to the Princes. "Choose!"

Roberto took the sword; Jorge the sack of gold; and Fernando, always polite, waited until the last and took the lute, which the others would not have.

"It only remains for me to assure you," the Fairy added, "that my protection will not fail the one of you who most merits it; and the day that you return triumphant to my godchild I not only shall recompense the victor but I shall punish the guilty."

The Fairy looked so hard at Rosa as she said this that the girl trembled.

Then, kissing Elena and smiling good-by to the others, the Fairy stepped into her chariot, which quickly disappeared among the clouds.

As it was now very late, the King and his friends returned to the house. But Rosa could not sleep. If the threats of the Fairy of Happiness frightened her, she was tormented even more by the cruel remorse that the kindness of her sister awoke in her

conscience. She compared her own conduct with that of Elena, and recalling the nobility of Elena, who, knowing her crime, hid it from every one, she cried bitterly; and as the tears of repentance carry away with them bad instincts, making room for generous resolutions, Rosa swore that she would repair the injury caused by her wicked deed. How true it is that sometimes one kind word or one good example will convert the hardest soul! And if the drop of water wears away the rock, why should not the heart be softened by a sorrowful flood of tears full of repentance!

Rosa, unable to lie still longer, jumped from her bed, threw on a cloak, and ran to look for the Witch, intending to beg her to return Elena's laugh in exchange for all Rosa's riches. On reaching the field in which the Witch had her home, however, the little Princess was alarmed to find that the briars and the thistles had been transformed into a very high wall, and against this her knocks and repeated cries brought no response.

Greatly grieved, she returned to the palace and entered the room of her sister, where she fell upon her knees and confessed all that she had done, begging Elena's pardon, and expressing her sorrow at not being able to undo it.

Elena embraced her sister lovingly.

"What has happened does not surprise me," she said. "That Witch is the incarnation of all that is

bad. When wicked thoughts directed your footsteps toward her, you found it easy to gain entrance to the cave; to-day, when it is the good and a wish to undo your wickedness, it is natural that you were shut out. But let us not talk more of something that we both wish to forget. I forgive you, little sister, with all my heart. Be comforted, hoping, as I hope, that very soon one of our brave Princes will return my treasure to me."

And when Rosa, saddened and shamed by the kindness of her sister, had retired to her room, Elena slept sweetly; and among her delightful dreams she saw returning triumphant, her former guardian, the Prince Fernando.

V

WHERE IS THE LAUGH?

VERY early the following morning the three Princes set out from the palace together. They did not remain long in the capital; for if the laugh were there, surely the King would have heard about it. They decided to search the small villages and the country homesteads, believing that some one of the many strangers who visited the celebration must now be the possessor of the magic laugh.

Nearly two months went by. They searched vil-

lages and towns and cities; sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot, sometimes in carriages; and always keeping silent as to their real object. Whenever they came to a town the three Princes would separate and each go about his inquiries in his own way. In the evening they would meet at an appointed place; and always there would be the same report:

"Nothing!"

They were beginning to lose hope when they heard in one village that some of the people of the neighboring town, Pimienta, had been to the celebration and had told about extraordinary things that had occurred in the capital. That same evening the three Princes hurried to Pimienta, and found a large crowd gathered in the public square.

"What is happening?" they asked a girl who was passing.

"It is a fête day," she said, "and we have a company of strolling players who are giving their performance in the square where all may see it."

For an hour the Princes mingled here and there with the crowd; and then they overheard a few words which brought new hope to their hearts. One woman was talking to another.

"But I tell you he has returned from the capital bewitched! Have you noticed that since—"

At that instant the crowd began to applaud the players so loudly that the Princes could not hear

what followed. They edged in closer to the two women.

"—what a strange laugh he has?" the first woman finished. "It is the most beautiful laugh in the world; but he did not have it before he went to the capital."

The Princes listened eagerly for the reply, hoping they might learn the name of the man of whom they were speaking. They dared not show their interest.

But just then the play ended and the crowd began to scatter; and they soon lost sight of the two women.

Then Fernando had an idea—inspired, no doubt, by the Fairy of Happiness. He took his lute and when he touched the strings there floated out upon the air the most enchanting melody that ever was heard.

The crowd, which had dispersed, came running back eagerly, lured by such delicious tinkling music, which soon changed to notes so lively, so fascinating that, without realizing what they were doing, the whole crowd began to dance, impelled by an irresistible impulse. Even the Mayor, so fat that he scarcely could move, grabbed his wife, who looked for all the world like a plump bolster, and they went waddling up and down the plaza. Beside this queer looking couple tripped the bony Professor with his slim wife. They were so tall and so thin that when seen together they resembled nothing quite so much

as the number 11. Even the Judge! A man whom nobody had ever seen smiling, he was now dancing gaily with the baker's daughter.

And there was such happiness, such irresistible gaiety among the dancers that everybody began to laugh, men and women, large and small; and among those laughs the Princes heard the delicious, the inimitable laugh of Elena.

Fernando stopped his music and in an instant was at the spot where the laugh had sounded.

Two women were talking together, apparently saying good-by. One was old and extremely ugly; the other was young and beautiful. Without hesitation, the Princes followed the girl. She now was talking animatedly with a companion of her own age, and in a few moments she laughed. Instead of the delicious harmony of Elena's laugh, there came from the girl's pretty lips the most disagreeable sound the Princes had ever heard.

Turning quickly, they ran after the old woman and followed her closely until she entered a little hut on the outskirts of the village. And while they hesitated a moment outside they were filled with delight to hear from within the cascade of harmonies for which they were searching.

VI

WHY THE PRINCES SEPARATED

THE Princes knocked loudly and long at the door of the old woman's hut.

At last a rough voice called out to them:

"Who is it?"

"Let us in, good woman," answered Roberto. "We have something important to discuss with you."

The door was opened slowly and the woman bade them enter. They took the cane chairs which she pushed forward, and then one of them asked:

"Was it you that we heard laugh so deliciously in the plaza?"

"Yes, sir; and it is the strangest thing I ever knew. I never have laughed so before. I went to see my son, who returned from the capital ill; and when I left his house I had this laugh."

"What was the matter with your son?"

"Nothing much. For two months he has been very nervous—brought on, he says, by a fright he had on the day of the celebration at the capital. He told me that a Witch hurt the Princess, and he was running after her with the crowd. Soon she opened her hand and a white butterfly flew out. It circled around a while and then, just as he opened his mouth to ask a question of his companion, the but-

terfly flew in and has never flown out again. Having that on his mind is what has made him ill."

"Has he been back here long?"

"No; he returned only this morning. But, sirs, you have not told me the object of your visit. I do not think it was merely to ask these questions."

Jorge, overcoming the repugnance which he felt when he looked at that ugly and dirty mouth, answered for the others.

"Madam, we are young and full of life; we are traveling just for the pleasure of seeing all this lovely kingdom; and we have a habit that is really a mania with us—that of making wagers. Unfortunately for me, my companions always win. And now it depends on your good self whether I win this time. I should like so much to be victor just once; and you seem so kind that I am sure you will not refuse me. When we heard you laugh in the plaza, I said to my friends: 'I wager you ten escudos that the owner of that laugh will give me a kiss.' You see, Madam, how easy it is to oblige me."

"With much pleasure," she grinned at him; and poor Jorge shuddered involuntarily. "Come kiss me, my boy!"

Forcing himself to think only of his triumph in returning to Elena with her treasure, Jorge shut his eyes and kissed the old woman's horrid mouth.

"You have won!" she exclaimed; and laughed.

Oh! Her laugh sounded like the hissing of a

snake mingled with the rumble of a thunderbolt. The Prince nearly fainted with astonishment.

"Why, what a strange thing!" exclaimed the old woman. "I have my old laugh back again!"

At that instant the Princes heard the melodious laugh of Elena in the adjoining room.

"Who is that?" cried Roberto.

"My grandson—the most beautiful of all the children in Pimienta."

"Have you seen him since you returned from the plaza?"

"Oh, yes. And I have smothered him with kisses. He is my favorite of all my grandchildren."

"Madam," Roberto said sweetly, "you were so very kind to my friend that I believe you will be kind to me also. I love children dearly. Will you let me see your beautiful grandchild?"

"Miguelín," the old woman called obligingly, "come here! There is a gentleman who wants to see you."

In the doorway appeared a beautiful little boy, his curly head bent over a white kitten which he was holding tightly in his arms.

The old woman hobbled over to him.

"This gentleman wants to talk to you," she said. "Drop the kitten, so it may run back to its own home."

Miguelín was an obedient little fellow; so, giving the kitten a final squeeze and a big kiss, he put it

on the floor and it quickly escaped. Then he went to speak to Roberto.

As the kitten slid through the door, it was so glad to be free that it gave a joyous "Me-eow!" and—the sound was the tinkling laugh of Elena!

Fernando had remained silent until then. Now he exclaimed quickly:

"What a beautiful cat! Whose is it?"

"It belongs to Mr. Luis's little daughter. He is the owner of the house you can see from that window. Delfinita is a friend of Miguelín's, and she lets him bring the cat home to play with sometimes."

"Don't you think," Roberto observed, "that we have taken enough of this good woman's time? She will want to go to her ill son."

"You are quite right," said Jorge; "but before we go I wish to give her, as is only proper, half of the wager which she helped me to win."

He handed five escudos to the old woman, and she accompanied them to the door with a beaming face and many blessings.

They hurried to Mr. Luis's house, and found the entrance guarded by a man and a woman.

"Good-afternoon," Roberto said pleasantly.

"Good-afternoon. What can we do for you?" asked the porter.

"We have come to see if the little daughter of this house will sell us a white cat which we should like very much to have."

"She would not sell it for all the money in the world. She loves that cat better than everything she owns."

Jorge, taking a handful of gold coins from the sack which the Fairy had given him, made a sign to the woman and, slipping the gold into her palm, whispered in her ear:

"If you let me have the cat I will give you as much more."

She was dazzled by the sight of so much gold.

"I will speak to my husband," she said; and after a few whispered words to the porter she turned again to Jorge. "To-night when Delfinita is asleep we will bring the cat; and in the morning we will tell her that it is lost."

A few hours later the Princes returned to get the cat, which the porter hastened to exchange for another handful of gold coins. But the poor cat, on finding itself being carried away, began a series of frightful *me-eows;* and in its cry there was not even a faint resemblance to the glorious laugh of the Princess Elena.

Jorge, furious, threw the cat to the ground.

"Keep the old thing!" he said. "It has too mean a disposition."

"Oh, no!" declared the porter. "That is because it does not know you. On the contrary, it is very affectionate. If you could have seen it with Delfi-

nita! Putting its paws about her neck and its face close to hers, as if it wanted to kiss her!"

"Is the little girl very pretty?" asked Fernando.

"The prettiest in the village."

"How old is she?"

"Ten."

"May we visit her to-morrow?"

"Impossible. Mr. Luis is away, and he has forbidden us to let any one enter the house during his absence. If we were to disobey we would lose our place."

Jorge offered him more gold; Roberto threatened him with his sword; but useless: the porter remained loyal.

The three Princes left sadly and started toward their hotel. Half-way there, Fernando suddenly turned to his companions.

"I am not sleepy," he said. "I will go back and walk around the house, to see if I can discover any way of getting in."

Leaving the others, he retraced his steps until he came once more to Mr. Luis's house. To his delight, he saw that one of the windows on the lower floor was filled with pots of flowers.

"That," he thought, "must be Delfinita's room."

Taking his lute, he began to play, very softly, such elfin music as had never been heard.

Soon the window was opened slowly and there ap-

peared the most enchanting creature, wrapped from her neck to her feet in a coat of exquisite blue.

When Fernando stopped his music, Delfinita leaned out and called to him softly, so that the porter might not hear:

"Please don't stop playing. I dearly love music!"

"I would continue with pleasure," replied Fernando; "but my lute is enchanted, and no music will come from it unless a child puts a kiss in the hand that plays the strings."

"Then, how did you play just now?"

"Your little friend Miguelín gave me the kiss I needed."

"I will kiss you too," said Delfinita.

She leaned her fair head down toward the Prince just at the instant that Roberto and Jorge, having heard the music, came running up. Wishing, themselves, to receive the treasure, they pushed Fernando aside roughly and fought with each other to be the one nearest Delfinita in order to snatch the kiss from her.

But her dainty lips were all ready to bestow the caress, and when in surprise she opened them, the kiss escaped and was lost in the air. Then—oh, strangest of things!—the wind whistled past them and in its music they heard the crystal laugh of Elena.

They ran quickly in the direction of the wind, but

the last tinkle of Elena's laugh soon was lost in the distance.

Then the discouraged Princes sat down on top of a hill and began to plan out what they should do next. Roberto and Jorge begged Fernando's pardon, and he granted it generously.

"I think," said Fernando, when they asked his advice, "that we would better separate and, in order to gain time, each one continue his search alone. Three paths run down this hill. We will each take one; and if in six months we have not accomplished anything, we will return to the capital to tell the King of our sad failure."

Jorge and Roberto agreed to this plan. The three Princes said good-by to one another, and each started off on the path he had chosen.

VII

THE GREEN IRIS

FERNANDO set out gaily along his path. At the first city that he came to he bought a troubadour's suit, and, pretending to be a strolling player, he searched through towns and villages far and wide. As his manners were so charming, he was so friendly, and he played such exquisite music on his lute, he was welcomed everywhere; and he made use of the good-will of his hosts by inquiring

in the houses he entered if anything extraordinary had happened in the village, giving as a pretext that such a tale would help him in composing his songs.

Thus five months passed. Far from being discouraged, however, Fernando grit his teeth and exclaimed to himself:

"Forward, always forward!"

One night about nine o'clock he entered a small village of which he had never heard. Taking the street pointed out to him by two men, he soon arrived at the hotel; and while he was having something to eat, he questioned the woman who served him, asking if there were not some castle near where he could earn a little money with his lute.

"Oh, sir," the maid answered, "just outside the village there is a very beautiful palace, but I should advise you not to go near it. Its owner, Filemón, a great and wise man, is just now in a diabolical humor because of something very strange that has happened to him."

"Tell me about it," requested Fernando. "Things of that sort interest me greatly."

"Well, I know you are a stranger if you have not heard about this, because no one is talking of anything else. About five months ago there swept over this village a terrible hurricane; and Filemón, desirous as always of studying what he calls the mysteries of nature, opened his window and stood there to watch the storm. According to what he

told the doctor, he had been observing the earth and the sky for an hour when suddenly the south wind doubled its fury; and it came not with terrible shrieks and moans but with the most delicious tinkling laugh. Astonishment caused him to stand there with his mouth open. Without doubt this wind was enchanted, for it rushed into his mouth, and ever since then when he laughs it is the lovely laugh of a young lady. This makes him furious. He has consulted the greatest doctors he can find; and none can determine the cause of Filemón's strange condition."

The Prince, hiding his great joy at this news, replied:

"I also know a good deal of medicine, and perhaps I can cure him if he will receive me."

"He would never do that. He does not like musicians nor poets, for he says they accomplish nothing in this world, and so waste their time."

"Tell me," said Fernando, "hasn't Filemón some one with him who comforts him and takes his mind off his misfortune?"

"No, sir; he lives all alone. He lost his parents when he was a child, and he has never married. He even boasts that he never kissed any one in his life."

The Prince asked the talkative servant many other questions, and gave her a generous tip.

"I have been much interested in your story," he said. "And as I like this part of the country and

may stay some time, I wish that you would tell me anything more that happens in Filemón's palace."

Many days passed while Fernando schemed out ways to see Filemón. But his plans were all in vain. In spite of his ingenious ideas, he failed to get near to the man who held the magic laugh.

He was thinking sadly of this one morning when he heard a loud knocking on his door.

"Come in!" he called.

The maid whom he had questioned in the dining-room entered, all out of breath, as if she had been running very fast.

"I have news!" she cried. "The whole village is excited over what has happened!"

"At the castle? Tell me quickly!"

"I forgot to tell you that for many years Filemón has had a strange idea that on the highest of our mountains there grows a green iris of exquisite fragrance and with magic virtues—an iris that neither he nor any one else ever saw. As he is very rich, and is a determined fellow, he had offered a large sum to any one who would bring him this magic flower. No one believed that such an iris existed; they thought it was just a madness of his brain. So imagine the surprise of the people to see Joaquinito, the shepherd-boy, this morning with the green iris in his hand! 'Where did you get it?' they asked him. 'At the top of the highest mountain, near the Fountain of the Bluebells,' he an-

swered, without stopping, as he ran on toward the castle. Well, when Filemón saw what he had so ardently wished for many years, his joy was so great that he—he, who had never caressed anybody in his life!—hugged the shepherd-boy to him and planted two loud kisses on his brown face. The people *were* surprised! Filemón was so delighted with the iris that he laughed merrily; and his happiness knew no bounds when he discovered that the bewitched laugh had left his lips. Turning to the doctors who had arrived at that moment, he exclaimed: 'See! I was right in saying that the green iris has magic powers! Only with its touch, only with its magic fragrance have I been cured! What prophecy, what science!' ''

Giving to the chattering woman a handful of escudos, Fernando said to her:

"I have to leave to-day. Take this and pay the landlord, and keep what remains. But before I leave this part of the country I should like to know Joaquinito. Where does he live?"

"In the Village of the Carnations, about an hour's walk from here. His father is the guard of a palace which is surrounded by a magnificent park and beautiful gardens and belongs to some rich young lords. The shepherd is probably back in the mountains now, looking after his sheep. I will go to the door with you and show you the road to the Village of the Carnations."

An hour later Fernando arrived at a little town whose streets were lined with rows upon rows of pink and white and red carnations, filling the air with an intoxicating fragrance.

"Can you tell me where I can find Joaquinito, the shepherd?" he asked a young man.

"Climb up to the top of that mountain, sir," the man answered, pointing to a high peak whose summit was lost in the clouds, "and without doubt you will find him."

Even though the side of the mountain was steep and slippery, Fernando was not discouraged. He refused to be daunted by either fatigue or danger. And so, after a long and difficult climb, he came at last to the top of the mountain and saw a young shepherd guarding his flock of lambs.

"Are you Joaquinito?" he asked.

"No, sir; I am a friend of his, and I guard his sheep with my own until he returns from a neighboring village. He will not be long. Oh, he is coming now!"

"How do you know?" Fernando asked; for he saw no one.

The boy smiled.

"Because he always climbs up the mountain singing or whistling, and I hear him. Listen to his laughing!"

A beautiful contralto voice reached them up the mountainside, and the song ended in a rich laugh,

merry, melodious, altogether charming—but not the magic tinkling laugh of Elena.

The shepherd-boy appeared from behind some rocks which until that moment had hidden him.

"Joaquinito," his friend called, "this gentleman has come to look for you."

"What can I do for you?" Joaquinito asked courteously.

"I wanted to know you and to congratulate you on having found the green iris. Where did you find it?"

"A little higher, near the fountain. It is the only one that grew on the plant."

"I felt sure—"

The other shepherd-boy interrupted with an exclamation:

"Have you given your parents the money Filemón paid you?"

"They were not at home and I gave it to my sister Lolita. She will give it to them when they return."

"Well, if you did not wait for your parents, how is it you stayed so long?"

"I knew you would not mind an hour more or less, and I wanted to give Lolita a surprise. She is my favorite sister, you know. I went to the woods to catch her a nightingale; and with my usual good luck, when I reached the park I saw one near the crimson rosebush. I caught it easily and carried it to Lolita."

"And your sister—what did she give you in exchange?"

"Many kisses, which of course I returned. Lolita and I love each other dearly."

And Joaquinito, seeing that one of his sheep was in danger of falling over the precipice, ran after it, crying:

"Morning-star! Morning-star!"

VIII

THE CRIMSON ROSE

FERNANDO said good-by to the other shepherd and, following the path he indicated, set out for the little house of Joaquinito's parents, hoping to find Lolita.

When he was still some distance off he saw a pretty little girl, with a tangled mass of black curls, and big, round black eyes. She was caressing a little bird and tying about its neck a red ribbon, murmuring to it words which Fernando could not catch. She kissed the bird then, and set it free, and it flew quickly off into the distance.

"Oh!" Fernando moaned. "The nightingale now has Elena's laugh!"

Quickening his steps, he reached the window of the little house before the girl had disappeared.

"Good morning, Lolita," he said pleasantly. "Don't you value the gift of your brother?"

She was astonished that a stranger should call her by name and know what had happened.

"How do you know who gave me the bird?" she asked, somewhat awed.

"Joaquinito is my friend, and he has told me."

Lolita at once became friendly.

"I let it fly away," she said, "because it was so sad. I thought to myself, 'If I, who love to run and jump, were caught and put in a cage I should die of grief.' So then, pitying the little bird, I gave it its freedom. Didn't you see how happily it flew away toward its nest?"

"Of course its nest is in the woods?"

"Oh, yes. Joaquinito told me that it is in an oak-tree near the park. I tied a little red ribbon around the birdie's neck, so I will know it if I ever see it again."

"You are a good child. Take this"—giving her some money—"and buy yourself a little present."

Fernando started off then to find the oak-tree; but when he was a short distance from it he heard the whistling of an arrow as it flew past him. Feeling that something was wrong, he ran toward the park; and there, at the edge of the woods, at the foot of a crimson rosebush, he saw with deep pity that a beautiful bird lay dead, a nightingale, and about its neck was a bit of red ribbon.

"Lost, lost forever!" he cried, throwing himself upon the ground and burying his face in his hands.

As he lay there a delicious melody reached him; and listening intently, without raising his head, he heard this song, sung in a heavenly voice:

Here in the park there grows a rose,
The sweetest flower the garden knows,
  Its own rosebush's pride!
More brilliant than the coral's red,
The sun's caress its blushes spread
  And lovely petals dyed.

Its fragrance perfumes all the air,
Its beauty is a thing most rare,
  Its elegance divine;
The breezes pause in sheer delight,
The dewdrops bring it pearls of white,
  The bees a honey-wine.

The soft grass offers a carpet of love,
The singing pines a shade above,
  The nightingale a song;
The glistening fountain, in tinkling words,
The murmuring winds, the cooing birds,
  Their trills of love prolong.

"A sweeter flower I've never seen
Than this, our lovely crimson queen,"
  The nightingale sang there.
The zephyrs caught his ardent song
And gently carried it along
  To spread it on the air,

The blushing rose, in happy pride,
Then opened her crimson petals wide,
To sunshine and to shower!
The nightingale with rapture flew
To sip the wine and sparkling dew
And kiss the blushing flower.

And so from that day on, they claim,
Here to the shadowy woods there came
This lover nightingale
To kiss the queenly crimson rose—
The sweetest flower the garden knows,
The pride of hill and dale!

When the last verse died away, Fernando jumped to his feet, once more filled with hope.

"Only the Fairy of Happiness can have that sweet voice," he thought. "She is helping me!"

He looked then at the rosebush, at the foot of which the bird lay dead; and he saw that only one beautiful rose remained. It was drooping sadly on its stalk, and in the heart of its red petals glistened brilliant drops of dew.

"One would believe," exclaimed the Prince, "that the rose also has cried!"

Instantly he remembered what the Fairy had said: that the laugh of Elena must undergo yet two more changes, and these would be produced by intense emotion, profound sentiment.

"Without doubt," Fernando said to himself, "the nightingale gave to the red flower, when he kissed it

with his little beak, the laugh of the Princess; and the rose's great distress when she saw her friend die has changed the kiss into drops of dew, which at times are the tears of the flowers."

And in this the Prince was not mistaken. Seeing dew on the flower at three o'clock in the afternoon and remembering the words of the Fairy had made him realize that the beautiful rose was crying.

Very happy to have found the laugh at last, Fernando first plucked a large plaintain-leaf and formed it into a sort of box; then, cutting the rose off gently, he guarded it carefully in his plantain-leaf, so that the rays of the sun might not evaporate the dew nor the wind blow it away.

With the remainder of the money that the King had given him for the journey, he bought a lively colt; and with his heart filled with sweet hopes, he set off at a gallop on the road to the capital of the Sapphires.

IX

THE ENCHANTED DEW

WHAT, in the meantime, had happened to Roberto and Jorge?

Each one followed the path he had chosen when the three Princes separated. Roberto, full of confidence in his own courage and in the sword which

"HE SET OFF AT A GALLOP ON THE ROAD TO THE CAPITAL OF THE SAPPHIRES"

the Fairy of Happiness had given him, thought surely he would triumph.

"Who can resist me and my sword?" he boasted to himself. "I know that I shall return the magic laugh to the Princess."

Consequently he went everywhere quarreling with the people and threatening them, and his only result was a host of enemies.

"Is there any one here," he would ask when he came to a village, "who has laughed in an unusual way for the past few months? Be careful! If you deceive me you will pay dearly for it!"

And at this point he would flourish his sword, until the people thought he was insane, and to get rid of him they would answer:

"Yes, sir; in *blank* village"—naming one many leagues away—"we have heard that there is such a person. Take that road on the right, sir."

Of course he never found the owner of the magic laugh!

Tired at last of his many failures, he took the road to the capital of the Sapphires, and went to the palace to tell the King of his fruitless search.

There he found Jorge, who had arrived the day before. This Prince, believing that all the world would bow down before money, dissipated by the handfuls the sack of gold coins the Fairy had given him; but, being finally convinced that although money is a great help it is valueless if all one's hopes

are put in it alone, he returned to the capital, sad and crestfallen, and lamenting his bad luck.

The King, in appreciation of the efforts of the two Princes, begged them to remain at the palace a few days until Fernando also should arrive.

"Has anything happened to him?" Elena asked herself sadly, worried by his long absence.

The following afternoon, when they were all seated on the terrace, they heard the furious galloping of a horse.

A few minutes later Fernando came running gaily up the steps that led to the terrace and, kneeling before the Princess, presented her with the crimson rose, bidding her put her dainty lips over the heart of the flower.

The Princess, smiling at Fernando, gave the lovely rose a tender kiss, absorbing as she did so the drops of dew, which, because of the enchantment, remained as fresh as if they had just fallen.

Elena, in the excess of her joy at having Fernando back safe, began to laugh; and from her lips there came the melodious cascade of harmonies which had been the gift of the Fairy of Happiness.

The intense emotion of the enchanted dew on finding itself again on the lips from which it originally came, caused the last transformation.

The great joy of all who heard Elena's laugh is quite beyond description. The Princess, after thanking Fernando affectionately, looked at the rose,

the talisman of her great fortune. But the flower, on coming into contact with those lips more red and velvety than its petals, paled with surprise and anguish, and closed its white petals in shame. Elena, in pity, held it to her lips and kissed it tenderly; and as charity *is life and gives life,* that compassionate kiss returned life to the withering rose, putting into it a mysterious vigor that transformed it into a red butterfly, which left Elena's hand and flew off in the direction of the Village of the Carnations. Without doubt, it wished to die beside the nightingale!

When the butterfly disappeared, the air became filled with a delicious fragrance, and from between delicately tinted clouds they saw descending toward them the beautiful chariot of the Fairy of Happiness.

X

THE KING'S GIFT

ELENA ran delightedly toward her fairy godmother, who took her into her arms.

"I come," exclaimed the Fairy, "to congratulate my godchild and Fernando—Elena for her good fortune, Fernando for his triumphant return. You remember, too, that I promised that I would see justice done. Before coming here I stopped to fulfil part

of my promise. Descending at the foot of the rocks which serve as a home for the wicked Witch, I touched them with my wand, making them immovable; so the Witch will now remain forever buried in her own home. The field of nettles and briars that were her garden, I turned into a deep lake; so no one now need fear it. There still remains for me to—"

On beginning this last sentence, the Fairy looked threateningly at Rosa. Elena, who had remained at her godmother's side, now interrupted her, saying very low, so that no one else might hear:

"Dear Fairy, forgive my sister! She has truly repented, and that has blotted out her sin."

"Yes, but not the trouble which she has caused. If she had not been corrected of her jealousy in time, I should have shut her under the rocks with the Witch. As it is, the Queen of the Fairies has forgiven her terrible deed."

"Neither my father nor any one knows the truth of what happened; and if you divulge it now, you will cause Rosa new suffering."

"To give you pleasure, my child, I shall continue to ignore it, as I have done. Come, Rosa," she added, "I am consulting Elena as to the reward I shall give Fernando for his triumph, and to the Princes for their trouble. Come and tell us what you think."

When the little Princess, trembling and hesitat-

ing, reached them, the Fairy lowered her voice so that only the two sisters could hear, and murmured, touching Rosa's lips with her wand:

"You sinned, and even though repentance has saved you, your crime was very great and you cannot escape without some punishment. So that you may know exactly how bad your action was, I shall punish you in just the way you wished to punish your sister. I condemn you to lose all power of laughing. The day may arrive when your crime will be completely pardoned, and if so your laugh will then be restored to you."

The Fairy turned to the others.

"Princes," said she, "even though you failed to find the magic laugh, I wish to reward you for your kindness in undertaking the search for my godchild. Roberto, as I know that your greatest wish is to possess a forest filled with deer, you will find when you return to your own kingdom, that the weed-grown fields of Alcoicín have been transformed into a magnificent forest through which roam multitudes of wild animals. Jorge, I know also your greatest wish. Take this letter, which will bring to you all that you most desire. It is to my friend, the King of Jauja, asking him to give you the hand of his only daughter, the heir to the throne; and I know that you will be accepted by the gentle Princess."

The two Princes thanked the good Fairy.

"To you, Fernando," she went on, "I give the

Kingdom of the Hortensias, which rightfully belongs to you. I shall dethrone the son of the usurper and the assassinator of your father."

"Kind Fairy," said Fernando, "why should the son suffer for the crime of his father? Let him keep the throne. I must follow the beautiful example of charity and pardon which I have just admired. Already I have received sufficient reward; there could be no greater happiness for me than to see the joy of my Princess and to hear again her enchanting laugh."

"But if you will not accept the gift of the Fairy," said the King, putting his arm around Fernando, "I hope that you will not refuse mine. I know Elena's feeling, and I think that I am not mistaken in yours. A few months ago, when I learned your history, I said that I had one child more; to-day I make that true by giving you the hand of the Princess."

Fernando knelt at the feet of the King, expressing to him his great joy at his good fortune.

At the invitation of the King, Roberto and Jorge remained in the Kingdom of the Sapphires to attend the wedding of the Princess. And there never was a celebration where the gaiety and rejoicing were greater. The Fairy of Happiness presided, disbursing many gifts and promises of good luck to all those present.

XI

THE LITTLE PRINCESS

TWO years had passed since the wedding of Elena, who was more beautiful and kind and happy each day; and the birth of a little son completed her joy.

In spite of Rosa's wish to show her delight, her lips would refuse to form themselves into her old happy laugh. The good King called in many physicians; and as none could find anything wrong with the Princess, they all assured His Majesty that time alone would cure her.

Rosa, now being completely rid of her wicked thoughts, tried more and more to become like Elena. That year there broke out a terrible epidemic of scarletina among the children of the Kingdom of the Sapphires, and Rosa begged the King to let her go to one of the hospitals to help nurse them, for the hospitals were filled to overflowing with the unfortunate little children. The King, not wishing to discourage his daughter in her good deeds, consented to let her go. Rosa could not return to the palace, for fear of bringing the contagion to her little nephew.

Day and night she spent at the bedside of the poor feverish children, cheering them and comforting

them with her inexhaustible tenderness. Then one morning she heard that Elena's little boy also had caught the fever. Alarmed and saddened, she hurried to him.

Day after day she sat beside his cot; and she carried out the instructions of the doctors with such intelligence and loving care that the baby began to recover.

One afternoon, when he was nearly well, he was playing with his aunt when he suddenly burst out into a happy laugh. And without realizing what she was doing, Rosa laughed too—as loudly and as merrily as the little boy. Elena, hearing her sister laugh, came running into the room; and as she entered there floated to them a silvery voice which seemed to come from the ceiling. It was saying:

"Charity and the love of children have saved you!"

At that instant the King came in.

"What has happened that you both look so happy?" he asked.

"Father," Elena exclaimed, "Rosa's delight at seeing my little boy well again has cured her! Listen, listen to her laughing!"

A servant entered the room at that moment to announce Prince Roberto. His kingdom was adjoining that of the Sapphires, and he often came to visit them. That day they noticed that he was unusually grave.

"You seem to be disturbed about something," the King said kindly, after he had greeted him.

"No, Your Majesty," the Prince replied. "I am here on an important mission. I have come to ask you for the honor of Princess Rosa's hand."

The King embraced Rosa tenderly.

"I know that you are worthy of my daughter, and I give her to you with all my heart—but providing it is pleasing to her."

The Princess, blushing prettily, hardly dared lift her eyes from the floor; but Roberto knew that her blush was sufficient answer, and he ran over to her happily.

One month later the wedding took place. It also was blessed by the presence of the Fairy of Happiness; and throughout the magnificent salons of the palace there resounded the mingled laughter of the two Princesses.

V

THE GENIE OF THE MOUNTAINS

I

THE UNINVITED GUEST

THROUGHOUT the Kingdom of the Bluebells all was noise and gaiety. Bells were ringing, horns were blowing, bands were playing, drums were being beaten as they never had been beaten before. For to the good King and Queen of the land a little daughter was born.

As was the custom on so great an occasion, a feast was held, and the Fairy protectors of the King and Queen were invited to be present as the guests of honor. They brought with them many gifts which they showered upon the baby Princess—talent, wealth, beauty, and goodness.

Unfortunately, Witches and Magicians are extremely sensitive creatures and the one thing that most offends them is not to be invited to a celebration where Fairies are to be present. And, sad to say, the monarchs of the vast Kingdom of the Bluebells quite forgot to invite to their feast the Genie of the Mountains. This unintentional omission was to cost them many tears.

When the festivities were nearing their end, the

guests were startled by hearing somewhere afar off a terrific noise as if it were a gigantic thunderclap; almost immediately a window of the banqueting-hall flew open and there appeared a little old man, wrapped in a lion's skin which completely enveloped him from head to foot and dragged on the floor behind him. Only his wizened face and his snapping black eyes peeped out.

With an angry frown he glanced round the room until at last he espied the King.

"I am the Genie of the Mountains!" he thundered, in a voice astonishingly loud for so tiny a man. "You did not invite me to your feast—I have come for my revenge!"

The King and Queen sat speechless with terror. But Fairy Goodheart answered for them.

"You are too late," she said calmly. "The baby Princess Aurora has all the gifts and all the virtues which we can give to a mortal; and your power cannot undo anything we have done."

The Genie's laugh made the palace tremble as if shaken by an earthquake. Without a word he ran to the cradle of the Princess and held his shaggy hand an instant over her golden curls.

"Well, as you have left no gift for me to *give*," he said, and laughed again, "I will *take* one."

With a quick jump, the little old man was out of the window and away. And the King and Queen saw, with great sorrow, that the lovely golden curls

of their baby had disappeared—her head was quite bare; not even one tiny hair remained.

"Do not worry," said a beautiful young Fairy. "Although I could not prevent the catastrophe, at least I can remedy it. A brave Prince will return to your daughter the curls which the Genie of the Mountains has stolen. I am the Fairy of Hope. On the day that Aurora is eighteen you will see me again."

With those words she disappeared, and the banqueting came to a sad end.

II

THE BEGGAR GIRL

TIME passed, and daily the Princess grew, as beautiful and as good as an angel. The King and Queen, so that Aurora might not be saddened by her loss, ordered that no woman in the kingdom should ever go with her head uncovered unless it were shaved bare. Thus the little Princess could not know that she was any different from other girls.

One day, however, there arrived at the gates of the palace a poor stranger, begging alms; and with her came her young daughter. As they knew nothing of the Princess' misfortune and the King's order, their heads were uncovered and showed mag-

nificent hair, which reached down almost to their feet and shone like gold in the sunshine.

The royal guard, indignant, grabbed the girl and was about to cut off her hair because of her disobedience in not wearing it under a hood.

"No, no!" screamed the girl, struggling in his strong arms.

At that moment it so happened that the Princess passed through the courtyard, and on hearing these strange exclamations she ran to the gate to see what could have caused them.

"What is the matter?" she cried in astonishment, gazing, amazed, at the girl's glorious head of hair.

The guards were speechless, for they knew not what to answer; and the beggars, of course, did not know that she was the Princess.

"They wish to cut our long hair," the woman said simply, "because they say the Princess of this kingdom hasn't any. Intercede for us! You look kind. If you know this Princess, beg her not to deprive me and my little daughter of the only thing we possess! She has everything—surely she will let us keep our hair!"

The Princess understood instantly what had happened, and at a gesture from her the guards stepped back and freed the beggar girl. The Princess then took the little girl by the hand and, without a word, ran to find her father. The good King was much grieved when he saw the beggar girl's long hair.

"Thank you, dear Father," said the Princess, "for your kind care of me; but I cannot have any one make sacrifices for me: it is not just. I wish to keep this poor girl always with me, and her mother too, so that they may never lack anything again. For through them I have had a new proof of your immense love for me."

III

THE FOUR PRINCES

AURORA was eighteen years old.

In the palace of the King a great feast was being prepared to celebrate the arrival of the four Princes who came to seek her hand.

The first of these Princes was named Othon; but his subjects, knowing that his whole happiness consisted in treasuring up riches, called him Prince Avarice. He had heard that the King of the Bluebells was powerful and wealthy; so he came to marry the Princess. Her lack of hair mattered not at all to him; for he considered that her enormous dowry more than offset this little defect.

The second, Prince Virgilio, was called the Indolent. He was heir to a kingdom of unruly subjects very difficult to manage; and, having heard of the great attractions and the great talents of the Prin-

cess, he wished to marry her so that she might become the real ruler of his kingdom and leave him to enjoy his laziness.

The third, Prince Narciso, was known as the Frivolous. Although he was very vain, he was not really bad. Greatly discouraged at being the youngest of his brothers and so having no hopes of inheriting his father's throne, he decided that it would be a very good thing to marry Aurora and thus have a chance for ruling over the Kingdom of the Bluebells.

The fourth, Prince Bradamor, his subjects called Prince Perfect, for he was a handsome young man who possessed not only every attraction but every virtue as well. Knowing the goodness of the Princess Aurora, he wished to marry her for herself only, hoping to win her love, that they both might have great happiness.

Trumpets and clarinets resounded throughout the kingdom, announcing the arrival of the four Princes.

In the throne room, elegantly and artistically decorated, the King and Queen waited with their daughter. The Princes entered, one at a time, and after the proper ceremonious salutation each passed on to occupy the seat designated by the etiquette of the kingdom.

Suddenly a window of the throne room opened and there entered a dainty little coach formed of a single emerald, drawn by doves with bills of coral

and eyes of sapphires; the reins were woven of garlands of roses and jasmines; and within appeared the Fairy of Hope enveloped in an atmosphere so luminous that it dazzled the eyes.

Every one rose at her entrance, and Aurora ran to embrace her. The Fairy kissed her godchild, and then addressed the King and Queen.

"I promised to return to you the day Aurora was eighteen," she said, "and, as you see, I have kept my word. Princes," she added, turning to the four, who were watching her admiringly, "the one of you who would win the hand of the Princess Aurora must first bring to her the golden hair which the Genie of the Mountains stole while she was yet in her cradle. One year from to-day I shall come here again, to reward the happy Prince who is triumphant. Until that time I prohibit any of you from entering the gates of this palace. Now, so that you may not doubt the generosity of the Fairy of Hope, I shall give to each of you a sack of gold—enough to cover all your expenses in your search for the lost hair. See well how you spend this money, so that its use may help you on to the triumph of recovering the golden curls and winning the hand of the Princess."

With these words the Fairy again kissed Aurora and then disappeared rapidly in her emerald carriage.

IV

THE LITTLE OLD WOMAN

THE four young men started off on their quest for the hair of the Princess; and Aurora hoped with all her heart that Bradamor might be the one to return victorious, for he was by far her preference of them all.

At the gates of the palace they separated, each one going on alone.

Hardly had Prince Avarice taken a dozen steps when a little old woman approached him, begging alms.

"Get out of my sight, you miserable beggar!" he exclaimed cruelly, giving her a rough shove which knocked her to the ground.

"Beware!" she cried. "This act of yours shall not be forgotten; for if the good are rewarded, also the bad are punished!"

The Prince, paying no attention to the occurrence, went on his way; but scarcely had he left the city when he found himself in a dense forest where the trees grew to an immense height.

"Stop! Hands up!" loud, rough voices called; and immediately six masked men jumped from their hiding-place in the bushes, and after robbing the poor Prince of everything he had they gave him

such a tremendous beating that, half dead, he had to crawl on his hands and knees to the nearest village. His injuries were so bad that he went to bed; and in bed he was compelled to stay for the whole year the Fairy had allowed for recovering Aurora's hair.

Prince Indolent, when he left the gates of the palace, walked along very slowly and in a bad humor. Being a lazy fellow, he did not relish the idea of having to search for the Princess' golden hair. Presently he came upon a poor old woman, begging alms.

"Get away!" he answered crossly and without stopping a moment. "I have too many things to do to be bothered with beggars!"

When he left the city, he saw that the mountain where the Genie lived was very far off, and, frightened by the fatigue and annoyance of such a long journey, he decided not to take the trouble to go there at all; so he hid himself away in a convenient house and passed the year in sleeping, eating, and drinking. The money the Fairy had given him he spent for a magnificent wig, with which he expected to deceive the King, thinking every one would believe it to be the hair of Aurora.

Prince Frivolous was some distance from the city when he came to a small river whose water was so clear and so smooth that his image was reflected as in a mirror. The Prince bent over the water and was in ecstasy admiring his handsome looks, the cut

and fit of his elegant clothes, the beauty of his pink-and-white skin, when he heard behind him a faint voice calling for help. It was a little old woman who had fallen in the midst of the forest. When the Prince went to her he saw that she was so dirty and so badly dressed that he was afraid he might soil his clothes, so he did not dare touch her, even to help her up.

"Here, good woman," he said kindly, tossing to her a large part of the gold which the Fairy had given him, "take this. I haven't time to stop to help you up, as I am in a big hurry, but I hear some one coming and perhaps he will help you."

He hesitated a moment, and then decided that he would return to the city, thinking that in no better way could he spend his money than in buying new clothes and adornments for his handsome self, and later on there would be plenty of time to go in search of Aurora's hair.

V

THE MAGIC CANE

IT was Prince Perfect who arrived just as Prince Frivolous left the old woman lying in the woods. Running up to the poor creature, he lifted her gently, and then gave her the entire contents of his sack of gold. Hardly had he done this when to his

astonishment the old woman turned into the beautiful young Fairy of Hope, still holding in her hand the walking-stick of the old woman.

"You have proved," she said sweetly, "that you are the best of the four Princes and so are most worthy of Aurora's hand. From now on I shall watch over you. Take this cane, and if ever you find yourself in a difficulty, ask the cane in my name to help you."

And the Fairy disappeared so quickly that the Prince had no time to thank her.

Happy and confident, Prince Bradamor kept on his way to the high mountain where the Genie lived. At the end of a month filled with countless hardships which he withstood with extraordinary courage and determination, he arrived at the foot of the mountain.

Here, to his astonishment, the road which had been so rough and rugged, so hard for him to travel, suddenly changed into a pathway of flowers. He followed this until he came to a high iron fence which entirely surrounded the mountain. It was impossible to climb it; he spent three days and nights going round and round it, and at the end of that time he discovered a tiny, almost invisible door. Through this the Prince meant to enter. And enter he did; but scarcely had he stepped inside when an enormous bear rushed at him, roaring loudly, and threatening to crush him in one of its powerful hugs.

But the Prince was not to be frightened. He quickly extended his magic cane, and exclaimed:

"Fairy of Hope, help me!"

Instantly the cane became a strong sword. Prince Perfect stood firmly and waited for the bear to come at him. When their heads were nearly together, he suddenly thrust the sword into the bear's side, forcing it in up to the hilt, and the ferocious animal fell dead among the plants.

The Prince thanked the kind Fairy for her aid; and when he started to clean the sword which had rendered him such good service he found that it once again was a cane.

Now inside of the high iron fence, Bradamor hastened to penetrate the magnificent garden that surrounded the mountain. But, the farther he walked, the farther off the mountain seemed! The explanation of this he found several hours later when he reached a small kiosk and read a card which was placed at the entrance to it:

> To you, brave mortal, who have been able to get so far as this, do not rejoice at your success; for you are in the Labyrinth of the Evil Spirits, from which you will never be able to escape.

For a moment the Prince was terrified; but soon overcoming his fright, he extended once more the magic cane and begged aid from the Fairy.

The cane jumped from his hand; and an instant

later he heard a joyous barking. There at his feet was a little white dog, wagging its tail gaily as if to say, "Follow me!"

This the Prince did; and after a few hours he found himself at the extreme end of the garden opposite the little iron door he had entered, and here the fence was so low that he could easily jump it. He turned to caress the precious little dog; but it had disappeared, and once more he had in his hand the magic cane. And at that instant he saw with astonishment that the labyrinth no longer existed.

Little by little, Bradamor climbed up the difficult mountain, whose roughness was becoming greater and greater the higher he ascended. After several weary days he came abruptly to a small river. As he could see the sand at the bottom of the water, he thought the river could not be deep, so he started in. But scarcely had he taken two steps when, with the deafening noise of a cataract, the water increased until it soon was a rushing torrent.

Not at all frightened, Prince Bradamor decided that he would swim across. But the current was so strong that while he thought he was advancing he was being carried farther and farther from the shore. His strength at last was exhausted, and he believed that he was lost. But suddenly he remembered the cane, which he carried in a sheath at his waist. Grabbing it quickly, he stretched it forth, begging aid. Instantly he felt himself caught up by

invisible beings and put into a small boat made of pearls and coral, which in a few minutes had him on the other shore. There he fell upon his knees to give thanks to the the kind Fairy, and as he got to his feet again he saw with joy that the boat had disappeared and at his feet lay the precious cane.

Beginning his march once more, he arrived at the foot of a wall which surrounded the summit of the mountain, where the Genie had his palace. Filled with happiness now, believing that surely he would succeed in his enterprise, he decided to climb over the wall rather than lose time in looking for a gate. Accordingly, he threw his cane over first, so that it would not be in his way, and then he quickly scaled the wall and found himself in a delicious garden.

Down one of the flower paths he saw coming toward him a beautiful young woman dressed in white, whose wealth of wavy hair fell to her feet, enveloping her like a mantle of gold. In her hand she held tightly the magic cane of the Fairy of Hope.

Bradamor spoke to the girl courteously, and then held out his hand for the cane, telling her that it belonged to him. But she refused to give it up.

"I know, Prince, why you wish me to return this cane. You are foolish to take so much trouble to get something that you may have just by extending your arm."

"I do not understand you."

"I know that you have come after the hair of a

Princess. Why trouble further? It certainly cannot be more beautiful than mine. I also am the daughter of a monarch, of the powerful King Hasam; my fortune is immense, my kingdom marvelous; all is yours if you will abandon your search for Aurora's hair."

"I thank you for your attractive offer," answered the Prince; "but a gentleman cannot break his word. I have promised to marry Aurora, first restoring to her the treasure of which the Genie of the Mountains robbed her; and I will die before I break my promise."

"You will die? Think well what you say."

"I will die!" the Prince declared firmly.

"Very well. You shall have what you have chosen."

Giving three claps of her dainty hands, the maiden exclaimed:

"Knights of the Torrent, come to avenge the insult to your Princess!"

At this warlike command, there appeared, surging up from out of the earth, two gallant knights, covered from head to foot with black armor. Raising their swords, they rushed at Bradamor. But, undaunted, the Prince detained them with a proud gesture.

"I am willing to fight you," he said, "but please notice that I have no weapon. Give me one, and immediately we will begin the combat."

One of the black knights gave a thump on the ground with his foot, and instantly a sword sprang up out of the earth. He hastened to give it to the Prince, who, being fearless and ready for the struggle, did not wait for the knights to begin the combat. He sprang at them, fighting them both at one time with great dexterity. Calm and quick in his actions, he parried the excellent thrusts which they directed against him, until taking advantage of the offguard of one of his opponents, with an understroke he knocked the weapon out of the knight's hand and, without losing time, threw himself upon his other adversary and thrust his sword into the second knight's chest.

With surprise he saw that his own sword escaped from his hand, and his enemies, instead of falling to the ground, disappeared by magic art, leaving only in the place of combat their two swords, which were transformed, as Bradamor watched them, into two canes precisely like that one given to him by the Fairy of Hope. He ran to grab them, thinking that one of them was his; but at that instant there came up out of the earth a loud roaring which soon changed into a crimson blaze. Into this the two canes jumped and performed the most prodigious dance that ever was known.

Bradamor, without hesitating even an instant, threw himself into the midst of the flames; but these, instead of burning his body, were destroyed the

moment he touched them, and on the ground at his feet lay the two canes, not injured by even so much as a scorch.

"At last you return to my power!" exclaimed the Prince happily, grabbing one of the canes.

Alas! In his haste to recover his treasure he did not stop to consider which of the two might be the cane of the Fairy. Scarcely had he touched the one he grabbed when it changed in his hand into a frightful serpent which opened its horrid mouth to spit its poison over him. With a quick jerk of his arm, Bradamor threw the serpent, with all his force, on to the ground, where its head was crushed by the impact and it died before it could harm him.

Now, radiant with joy, the Prince turned to pick up the other cane, sure this time not to mistake; but during the struggle with the serpent the second cane had disappeared.

Bradamor was not discouraged. He started once more on his way, exclaiming as he went:

"Fairy of Hope, I well see that you have wished to prove my courage. If you are not yet satisfied with me, I shall gladly suffer anything further that you may command; but never, never will I give up my search, however many or great may be the obstacles which obstruct my path!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when he felt his precious cane once more in his hand, without knowing how it got there.

"Thank you, kind protector!" he cried happily, kissing the cane in his great joy. "Never will you be separated from me again!"

In high spirits, he was ready now to continue his journey; but first he stopped a moment to admire the extraordinary beauty of the flowers in that marvelous garden. He gazed upon them in rapture. Then suddenly he was conscious of sharp pains all over his body, and he saw with astonishment an enormous army formed of beetles, ants, and lightning-bugs which seemed to surge up out of the earth. Each tiny soldier wore armor of gold and silver; and it was their wee lances pricking into Bradamor which caused the sharp pains he felt. At each instant the army grew larger, until the Prince was almost covered and suffocated by the great number of his enemies. The beetles came at him as a solid phalanx of infantry; they were followed by ants mounted on crickets to form the cavalry; and the lightning-bugs descended upon him as an aeroplane squad.

Bradamor fought them gallantly for a while; but they came in such hordes and he was suffering such pain that at last he had to call upon his magic cane. With his last strength he brandished it and cried:

"Fairy of Hope, protect me!"

The cane flew from his hand and was changed into a giant butterfly, which quickly began crushing with

"THE CANE FLEW FROM HIS HAND AND WAS CHANGED INTO A GIANT BUTTERFLY"

its strong wings the lilliputian warriors or spearing them with its antennæ. The few who escaped this ferocious onslaught flew to hide themselves in the fastnesses of the earth. And when the struggle was over, the bodies of the insects killed in battle formed a thick carpet over the pathways of the garden.

Holding again his magic cane, the Prince went on his way. Only a few more steps remained between him and the palace of the Genie. Suddenly he heard a noise like a strong wind beating through a forest; and as he looked, the glorious flowers and trees of the garden, as if by enchantment, left the places where they had grown and flew together in front of him, interlacing their branches and leaves until they formed a hedge so close-woven that they hid completely the view of the palace.

The Prince tried to break through them. But the thorns of the roses and briars, biting into his flesh, hurt so cruelly that he was obliged to desist and call to his fairy protector. A black cloud quickly covered all the blue of the sky; a frightful thunder-crash resounded through the garden; and hailstones and lightning came so quick and so fast that in a few moments, when the cloud passed and the sun shone once more, neither a flower nor a tree existed—all had been destroyed by the torment!

VI

IN THE GENIE'S PALACE

AT last Bradamor approached the door of the palace. And he saw standing on the threshold, awaiting him with a frown, the Genie of the Mountains, wrapped in his magnificent lion skin.

"Who are you, insolent mortal?" growled the Genie. "How dare you enter my kingdom! What do you want here?"

"I am Prince Bradamor, and I have come to beg you to give me the hair of the Princess Aurora."

"Bringing destruction and extermination is how you ask favors, is it?"

"Each one asks as he is able," Bradamor replied calmly.

"I will teach you how to respect me!" the Genie cried furiously. "Trapolini! Gordiano!" he called in a loud voice. "Come, show this insignificant creature how he must speak to the powerful Genie of the Mountains!"

Instantly there appeared a monster Dwarf, with terrible claws in place of fingers, and an enormous Giant armed with a cudgel proportionate to his size. The two started for the defenseless Prince, who, seeing himself lost, once again called to his aid the good Fairy who had saved him from so many dangers.

The Giant already had suspended over him the tremendous club; but the Prince's cane was now a sharp poniard, and giving a quick jump he escaped between the Giant's legs and with one clean stroke cut off a foot of his terrible adversary. The Giant fell to the ground, howling with pain. But the Prince had no time to rejoice over his triumph; for the Dwarf Trapolini sprang at him, threatening to tear him to pieces with his sharp claws. The Prince raised his poniard and with a single stroke severed the claws from the Dwarf's hands. Trapolini turned and flew, screaming with rage and pain. New combatants now rushed up, to avenge their comrades; but the Genie waved them back.

"Be gone!" he said; and then turned to Bradamor. "Prince, I see you are protected by some being more powerful than I; so it is useless for me to struggle against you. I am disposed, therefore, to grant what you request. Take this key. With it open a red cupboard you will find in a room which I am going to show you. There, in a flask, changed into essence of roses, is the golden curly hair which you have come to find. Pour the contents of this flask over the head of Aurora and instantly her hair will be restored to her and will be far more beautiful than any one can even dream." The Genie frowned. "When you have the bottle, leave at once!" he said. "I cannot answer for my patience."

They had been walking through the palace, and at

that moment they reached a heavy iron door, which the Genie opened.

"Here is the room," said he.

And the Prince lost no time in entering. He ran to the red cupboard and had it open in a second. In front of the flask which contained the essence of roses there was a small box that was in his way. Impatient to get at the flask, he grabbed the box and flung it out of the one small high window which let light into the room.

It happened that this window looked out over the wall which surrounded the palace; and as the box was thrown with such impatient force, when it once struck the ground it rolled until it landed at the foot of the mountain. There it was found by Prince Frivolous, who, after spending ten months enjoying his new and handsome clothes, had started off in search of Aurora's hair. He had stopped, undecided. To climb the rough mountain meant that his gorgeous new suit would become torn and soiled. Then, too, the agreed date when they all were to meet at the capital of the Bluebells would soon arrive; perhaps there would not be time to scale the mountain. After carefully spreading his handkerchief on a clean rock, so that his elegant clothes would be protected, he sat down to think it out.

And there, at his very feet, fell the box which, unknown to him, Bradamor had thrown from the top of the mountain. Prince Frivolous stooped to

pick it up; and what was his great joy to read on it this inscription:

The Marvelous Beauty of Ethiopia

Mad with delight at his find, he no longer thought of Aurora's hair but started at once on his return to the capital, confident that his own handsomeness combined with the wondrous gift which had fallen into his hands would win for him forever, the heart of the Princess Aurora.

In the palace of the Genie, Bradamor, standing before the red cupboard, quickly grasped the flask containing the essence of roses, and then turned to leave the room and the palace as rapidly as possible. To his horror, he saw that the door had completely disappeared; where it had been there was only blank, iron wall.

Useless were all his screams. He only heard the loud laugh of the Genie and his mocking words:

"You are my prisoner now—and never will you escape! You shall pay dearly for your boldness!"

Poor Bradamor was terrified. For a moment he forgot the power of his magic cane. All that he had conquered, he thought, would come to nothing! But he could not resign himself to losing Aurora forever.

Then suddenly he remembered his cane.

"Come to my aid, dear Fairy of Hope!" he cried with all his strength.

The little high window through which Bradamor had thrown the box of beauty began to enlarge rapidly until it was soon a wide door. Through this, the Prince with great joy saw coming toward him an airplane of pure gold, the latest creation of the Queen of the Fairies. He jumped into this airplane at once; and with a speed quite unknown to modern inventors he arrived at the gates of the palace of his loved one.

It is told that the Genie of the Mountains, going out on to a balcony to see what could be that gigantic bird which flew past, saw in the airplane his prisoner escaping, and he was so furious that in an access of rage he pulled out his long white beard. As his entire power lay in his beard, he remained forever after unable to do evil to any one.

VII

THE RETURN OF THE PRINCES

A PROFUSION of lights and flowers adorned the palace of the King and Queen of the Kingdom of the Bluebells. It was the day designated for the return of the four Princes. Aurora, seated in the throne room, awaited the arrival of the travelers.

The first to present himself was Prince Othon, the Avaricious. As he was not completely cured of

the wounds given him by the thieves, he came leaning on a crutch.

"Beautiful Princess," said he, kissing the hand of Aurora, "I have not accomplished my desire by securing the treasure; but the labor and the suffering that I have gone through in order to get it have made me as you see. Perhaps your good heart will take this into account and give me the prize to which I aspire."

"Prince," the King interrupted, "we are very sorry for your misfortunes; but before granting to any one the hand of my daughter I must hear all who come to seek it. Kindly take a seat and wait."

At noon Prince Virgilio, the Indolent, entered on a litter. He languidly descended and bowed before Aurora, giving her very grandly the box in which he had the wig.

"Open it, Prince!" said the King.

Virgilio did so; but what was his astonishment to see that what had been a gorgeous wig of golden hair, and for which he had paid so many good pieces of gold, had now been turned into a hideous wig made of skeins of silk of many different colors. Furious, he marched to his seat, assuring every one that the box had contained the golden hair of Aurora and that the Genie of the Mountains, for revenge, had transformed it on the way.

In the afternoon, dazzling in his showy dress and his handsome magnificence, Prince Narciso, the

Frivolous, entered and gallantly saluted Aurora.

"Beautiful Princess," said he, "even though I could not secure what I wished to bring you, perhaps you will not regard me disdainfully."

Stepping to one side, he took the precious box out of his pocket and, so that he might be even more exquisite, he quickly splashed some of the contents of the box over his face. Then he turned to Aurora again, sure that she would now be entranced by his unearthly beauty.

"Will you accept me, my adorable Princess?" asked he, believing that she could not possibly refuse any one so handsome.

His question was answered by a scream of laughter from every one in the room.

"What—ha! ha!—have you done—ha! ha!" roared the King, unable to control his mirth.

Taking Narciso by the arm, he turned him around until he faced a mirror. The poor Prince stood horrified to see that his once handsome face was now as black as ebony.

"Oh, woe is me!" he wailed; and told them then the strange story of the little box.

The King took the box and read aloud the inscription:

The Marvelous Beauty of Ethiopia

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know that

Ethiopians are black, and that for them the greatest beauty of all is to have the skin blacker than carbon?"

At the good King's command, the servants brought water, soap, and lotions of all kinds. But useless. The Prince's face remained black in spite of all their scrubbing. Crying bitterly, Narciso hid himself in the farthest corner of the salon, so that no one might see his shame.

The hours passed and Bradamor did not come. Aurora, sad and worried, forced herself to hide her anxiety.

When the time stated by the Fairy of Hope had almost expired, every one in the throne room suddenly leaned forward to listen to a sweet voice which floated up to them through one of the windows.

"Oh, do not cry, my Princess dear,
So beautiful and fair,
For now Prince Bradamor is here
And brings your golden hair.

New beauty it will give you
Who are so lovely now;
The dainty curls of golden hue
Will crown your fair, sweet brow.

These curls the stars have surely spun
—They are so wondrous fine!—
Of rays of gold right from the sun.
How gloriously they shine!

If you return my love so true,
Then happy indeed am I.
I hasten now at once to you. . . .
O Princess dear, don't cry!"

A few minutes after the song ended, Prince Bradamor, the Perfect, entered the throne room. Saluting every one courteously, he went over to where Aurora waited, tense and trembling, and emptied over her head the contents of the flask he had with such great pains secured from the Genie of the Mountains. Instantly the head of the Princess was covered with fine and beautiful hair which, enveloping her like a mantle, fell in golden waves to the floor.

While every one was looking with amazement at this miracle, the room was suddenly flooded with a brilliant light, and there stood the Fairy of Hope, dressed in white, her gown shimmering with dust of gold and flecks of silver.

"Aurora," said she, taking the hand of Prince Bradamor, "here is your husband—the only one worthy of you. With a great soul, noble and generous, he alone was able to come triumphant through the tests to which he was put. He stands here an example of kindness and heroism. You see that without Hope we can accomplish nothing in this life; but Hope alone is not sufficient; to get what you desire there must also be Determination and Good

Deeds. Sooner or later in this world virtue will be rewarded and evil punished."

Turning with a frown to Prince Avarice, the Fairy added severely:

"As such cruelty and avarice as you have shown cannot go unpunished, I have permitted during your absence an enemy army to enter your kingdom. It has sacked your palace and carried off all your treasures; and when you return you will find yourself poorer than any of your subjects."

Prince Avarice, in desperation, ran quickly from the room.

"And you, Prince Indolent," the Fairy went on, "shall be punished for your laziness and lack of heart. When you return to your kingdom you will find your throne occupied by a usurper, active and powerful. Your subjects are tired of a ruler who left the affairs of state in paid hands so that he might spend the time only in eating and drinking; so they have dethroned you; and now, poor and destitute, you will have to earn your living by good, hard work!"

Prince Indolent was dismayed to hear these severe words.

The sobs of Prince Narciso had drawn the Fairy over to his corner.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, good Fairy, you see what it is! But I ask

nothing—I deserve all that happened to me, for being vain and a fool!"

"You have advanced far toward getting pardon when you realize your fault and are truly sorry."

"Ah, my good Fairy, do I dare hope?"

"You ask me that, knowing my name?"

"Hope! What joy!"

And so deeply did the poor Prince feel that he began to leap and jump about the room in such a foolish way that he made every one roar with laughter.

"I told you before," said the Fairy, "that every noble deed receives at some time its reward. Even though you did not help the poor old woman in the woods to get up, you spoke kindly to her and you gave her a large part of your gold. To your generosity, and your repentance, perhaps will be due some day the recovery of your white skin which you have lost."

"Tell me, oh, tell me, dear Fairy, what I must do," begged Narciso, falling on his knees before her.

"I cannot answer you now. Retire to your room, and later you shall know."

Mad with delight, Narciso hurried out of the throne room to the apartment in the royal palace which had been set aside for him.

On the following day the wedding of Aurora and Bradamor took place, and the good Fairy of Hope remained to shower her blessings upon them.

As they both were so charitable and generous, not one person in all the Kingdom of the Bluebells remained poor when Bradamor ascended the throne. He and Aurora lived for many years, happy and contented, with their five children, who were as beautiful and as good as their parents; and over whom, with real affection, ever watched the kind and powerful Fairy of Hope.

VI

THE CAVE OF EMERALDS

(Sequel to "The Genie of the Mountains")

I

THE GOLD CHAIN

THE unfortunate Prince Narciso did not wish to be present at the elaborate wedding of the Princess Aurora. Accustomed as he was to receiving so much admiration from every side, he could not now stand being the object of mockery because of his shining black face.

Shut up alone in his apartment, he cried bitterly, and with all the ardor of his heart he begged the Fairy of Hope to hasten the moment when he could recover his lost enchantment. And the good Fairy was not deaf to his pleas.

"I am truly sorry for your misfortune, Prince," she said to him. "Directly, I can do nothing to remedy it, but I shall help you as much as I can, and at all times I shall watch over you. There is only one being in all the world who knows the secret for returning the whiteness to your face. He is the Genie of the Green Rocks, and fortunately he is a friend of mine. I shall give you this letter to him in which I ask him to grant your requests. But he is a peculiar old man, and if you would learn from him

what you so ardently desire to know, you must obey him blindly."

Narciso thanked the Fairy effusively.

"And now, good Fairy," said he, "tell me how I may find the Green Rocks. I wish to start at once."

The Fairy unfastened from her neck a gold chain from which hung a small gold anchor.

"When you go to bed to-night," she said, handing him the chain, "put this over your chest; and when you wake in the morning you will find yourself very near the Green Rocks. I am doing this for you because of your kindness in giving me the money when you found me in the woods in the form of an old beggar. Good-by, Prince. If at any time you need me, call me, for I never abandon those I protect."

Before retiring that night, Narciso said good-by to the good King and Queen; and they as well as Aurora and Bradamor wished him the greatest success in his adventure. When, a little later, he climbed into bed, his heart was full of smiling hope; for the chain of gold which the Fairy had given him was carefully fastened about his neck.

Scarcely had the sun peeped up in the East when Narciso was awakened by the sweetest trilling of millions of birds. He was filled with astonishment to find himself lying in the middle of a field, until suddenly he remembered all that had occurred. Instantly he jumped up and set off gaily toward a hill

that rose not far ahead of him. And as he went, the birds flew with him, amazing and delighting him by their melodious trills.

On arriving at the top of the hill, Narciso stopped a moment in hesitation. From where he stood there were a number of distinct paths, running in different directions, and he feared that he might take the wrong one.

"Precious little birds," said he, turning his face upward to his winged companions, "if you are as good as you are beautiful, show me where the Genie of the Green Rocks lives."

They trilled softly in answer, and Narciso thought he heard them saying:

"You are near his home. We are the messengers of the Fairy of Hope, and have come to show you the way."

Joyously the Prince followed them; and with their guidance it was not long before he found himself before a promontory of rocks that seemed to be formed of one single and enormous emerald. Narciso climbed to the top of this; and there a little redbird with wings of turquoise blue began to knock with its dainty foot at an opening which appeared in the emerald.

Instantly there came up to them out of the Green Rocks a queer little man, very small and very ugly, dressed in green from his feet to his head. Then the birds, flapping their wings as a signal of their de-

parture, mounted into the air and were soon lost to sight.

II

THE LITTLE GREEN MAN

"WHAT has brought you to this unknown place?" the little old man scowled at Narciso.

The Prince saluted the Genie with a low bow, and then gave him the letter from the Fairy of Hope.

"My good friend Hope is right," the Genie said after reading the letter. "I am the only one who knows secrets sufficiently powerful to destroy the magic of the Genie of the Mountains. To oblige the Fairy of Hope, I am willing to help you; but I must tell you that I never do anything without being paid for it."

"Ask what you will of me, sir. The gold that I must give you will be as nothing, nothing, if I can but recover the lost color of my face!"

To these words the Genie answered with such a violent laugh that the mountains trembled and even the Green Rocks shook beneath their feet.

"You offer me gold! Ha! Ha! Perhaps, poor ignorant thing, you do not know that there is not in all the world a King whose fortune can compare with mine. I am the absolute owner of all the riches

"INSTANTLY THERE CAME UP TO THEM OUT OF THE GREEN ROCKS A QUEER LITTLE MAN"

that are hidden in the ground, and I let men take from the mines only what I am willing that they may have. I make the gold, the silver, the iron, the diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and other multitudes of metals and precious stones. I fire at my pleasure the volcanoes; and I cause the earth to upheave in order to produce destruction and extermination. So you see that it is not gold that I need."

"Then tell me, sir, what is it you wish of me?" the Prince asked somewhat anxiously.

"I wish that for one year you be my servant, obeying me absolutely in everything."

Narciso hesitated at this strange request; but at last he consented.

"It is well," said the little green man. "But that is not all that you must do in order to regain your white skin. The most important thing is for you to correct the fault that caused you to lose it. If, during this year as my servant, you are guilty three times of vanity, you must spend the rest of your life in the Green Rocks and never will you recover your whiteness. You see that I am generous; for, knowing how hard it is for any one to correct a fault the first time they are tempted, only at the third offense will I make your punishment eternal. But do not think, by that, that you can sin twice with impunity, for each fault that you commit will be severely punished. But as I wish to oblige the Fairy of Hope, I agree to restore your white skin provided

that at the end of the year you have conquered your one big fault—vanity. Do you accept?"

"With all my heart!"

"Very well. Follow me!"

The Prince entered through the narrow opening; and stood a moment gazing in astonishment at the marvelous things which he saw within.

The interior of those green, sharp-pointed rocks formed a magnificent palace of riches and splendor beyond even the wildest imagination. The walls were covered with emeralds, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, which, embedded in latticework of silver and gold, formed a mosaic of indescribable beauty. Also, every piece of furniture in the palace was made of rich metals ornamented with precious stones.

In this gorgeous mansion the Prince spent a month, and not one cause for complaint had he given the Genie; being humble and obedient, quick to carry out the slightest wish of the little green man, he did not have occasion to receive even the mildest correction.

III

THE FIRST PROOF

ONE morning the Genie called the Prince, and after going down interminable steps they entered an immense room filled with machinery and huge cauldrons.

"This is my laboratory," said the little green man. "Here I make the riches that the good earth guards. In these retorts I make gold, in these crucibles silver; here I keep the germs of the precious stones, which I deliver to the mines that they may grow there; and here I have even the fire that feeds the volcanoes. To-day you are going to see all this powerful machinery in motion. It is very simple to manage. Do you see that little golden wheel that stands out among all the rest? Take the handle that is near it and turn it until my little men come to relieve you in about two hours. Then, to reward you for your good work, I will present you to my only daughter whom so far you have not met. But you must come just as you are, from the work; for Milka is extremely simple and does not like too much etiquette. Never have you seen beauty equal to hers!" The Genie laughed. "She does not resemble her father!" he added; and the next moment the Prince found himself alone in this strange laboratory.

He started toward the little golden wheel, but as he neared it he stopped in alarm. In order to reach it he must pass through a veritable river of mire, formed by the ashes from the coal and metals and the oil from the machinery. He wished to cross over, but when he felt his feet sinking in that loathsome mixture he stepped back. How could he present himself afterward to the beautiful daughter of

the Genie with his clothes soiled and his hands blackened? He stood there at the edge of the river meditating upon a way in which he could obey the Genie by turning the wheel and at the same time save his clothes. He thought and he thought; and the time flew by without his realizing it.

Suddenly the door opened with a loud noise, and the Genie appeared and ran up to Narciso with a black frown.

"Why have you not carried out my orders?" he thundered.

"Sir," stammered the Prince, "I did not mean to disobey you. I was trying to find a way to get to the wheel without soiling my clothes, so that I might with dignity meet your beautiful daughter."

"That is to say, your vanity caused you to fail in your duty. Remember what I told you!"

And with a small wand which he carried, the Genie lightly touched the ears of the Prince. Imagine Narciso's shame and bitterness when, after going up again to the palace, he saw as he passed a mirror that his ears had been changed into those of a donkey. Sobbing, Narciso fell at the feet of the little green man, begging mercy; but, inflexible, the Genie would not hear his pleas, and what was even worse he compelled the Prince to follow him to the salon where the beautiful Milka waited. Narciso stood overwhelmed at the sight of Milka's unearthly

loveliness; and more than ever he lamented the punishment he had received.

"You asked me for a servant," the Genie said to his daughter, "who can accompany you on your rides. There is none better than this one, for his ugliness will put to flight any who intended coming near you."

What humiliation for poor Narciso, accustomed always to hear praise for all his enchantments!

Milka, whose goodness was really greater than her beauty even, rode every day with Narciso in an open carriage drawn by two deer that ran with lightning speed. The object of her rides was always to do some good deed and to carry comfort and help to the homes of the poor who lived in that part of the country. The unhappy Prince watched with admiration and with amazement this beautiful girl who, entirely forgetful of herself and her own enchantments, was occupied solely in doing good to others; and he compared his own life, useless, frivolous, egotistical, with the virtuous and charitable life of Milka. He admired Milka so greatly that when he was near her he did not feel his own disgrace quite so much.

IV

THE SECOND PROOF

THE Genie called Narciso one afternoon, and they went together to a distant field, where a large number of men were working furiously without resting for even a moment. Narciso saw with astonishment that every man in the field was humpbacked.

"I have brought you here," said the Genie, "to help these good men. They must prepare the earth, because to-morrow begins the sowing."

And leaving a spade in the Prince's hands, the little green man returned to his emerald home.

With enthusiasm Narciso began his task.

Soon, however, being so unaccustomed to the work, he began to be very tired and to feel sharp pains in his shoulders, caused by the long time he was stooped over the earth. He stopped to rest a little; and turning presently to one of his companions he asked him how it happened that all the men were humpbacked.

"When we came here," the laborer answered, "we were as straight as you, but because of stooping over our spades so long we have become as misshapen as you see us."

"That is to say," thought the Prince, "the only thing left me is my splendid figure, and now I am to lose that also with this stupid work!"

This reflection made him throw his spade violently from him; and at that instant the little green man appeared in the field.

"What have you done, unfortunate one?" he demanded.

Narciso, confused, lowered his head.

"You do not answer? Never mind! I know very well what has happened, and you are going to be punished. In the six months that you have been here you have been guilty twice of your overwhelming fault. Remember that according to our agreement never will you leave this region if you sin for the third time."

And resting his hand a moment on the Prince's shoulder, the Genie started off.

Instantly the handsome body of the unlucky Prince was turned into a humpback much worse than any of those around him. With a sob of misery, he ran after the little green man, but he did not reach him until he arrived at the subterranean palace. There the Prince fell upon his knees.

"Pardon, sir!" he begged.

"It is useless for you to ask it. You know already that by conquering your vanity you will be corrected of your great fault and will then recover the enchantments that you have lost. But from what I

have seen I fear that you will never accomplish it. Twice you have sinned, remember!"

Milka, so compassionate and good, interceded for the afflicted Prince, who now, full of shame, did not dare present himself before her.

But the Genie was inflexible.

V

THE THIRD AND FOURTH PROOFS

SOME time after this, Narciso left the Green Rocks to carry a letter to a castle some distance away, and as he drew near to a woods he was startled by hearing groans that came from a patch of thick briars. As he approached he saw with astonishment a little girl who had fallen over the cliff above.

His first impulse was to turn away, fearing the thorns that would tear him and his clothes if he should try to rescue the child; but suddenly he remembered Milka and her charity with the unfortunate; and as a good example is always contagious, he resolutely entered the brambles and saved the little child, even though he felt the thorns tearing his face and his hands and destroying his clothes.

He then began anew his journey to the castle; and finding himself more agile and light-hearted he thought: "This is the happiness that rewards a

good action!" But in crossing soon afterward a crystal stream he saw his figure reflected in the clear water and to his great delight his humpback had disappeared! Mad with happiness, he hastened to carry the letter to the castle, wishing to return as soon as possible to the Green Rocks to show himself to Milka, as by following her example he had managed to conquer his vanity.

Only a few days remained before the end of his journey. Approaching a little village, he saw from a distance a great blaze from an enormous fire. On running to learn what was happening he found a house wrapped in flames, and a poor woman half mad with grief trying to rush through them to save her little son who slept in a cradle in one of the rooms which the fire was devouring. Narciso, without thinking of the danger to himself, jumped into the middle of the roaring blaze, and a moment later appeared with the child in his arms. In his heroic act the fire had been so near to his face that he feared, in spite of feeling no pain, that it must be greatly burned. Instinctively he put his hands up to his face. And what joy was his when he found that instead of the horrid ears of a burro he now had his own, so small, so perfect!

Everything in this world comes to an end; and Narciso's year in the Green Rocks was approaching its conclusion. The day that he completed the specified time, the Genie of the Green Rocks called

him and gave him a box formed of a large emerald.

"From to-morrow you are free," he said. "Here you have what you desire. To-night when you go to bed cover your face with the powerful pomade that is in this box, and when you get up in the morning your face will be as white as it was before you put on it the malicious ointment of the Genie of the Mountains. And now, as a reward for your good behavior, I invite you to spend a while with us—not as a servant but as a dear guest."

With such enthusiasm did the Prince embrace the Genie that he almost threw the little fellow off his feet.

That night he did as he was told; and it is impossible to express his joy on seeing himself in the mirror the next morning more handsome than he ever had been before. He ran quickly to the little red salon, where he knew he would find the Genie and his daughter.

What was his surprise to see Milka crying bitterly, and the poor Genie no less afflicted!

VI

THE GIANT'S PLEDGE

"WHAT has happened?" Narciso asked Milka gently.

But she was sobbing so broken-heartedly that she

could not answer; and the little green man spoke for her.

"Alas, in this world there is no complete happiness," said he. "At the moment that we are preparing a feast to celebrate your triumph—and a triumph it is, to overcome your bad inclinations—a great misfortune has befallen us."

"Can I do anything to help you? You have been very good to me, and I have grown fond of you, and more fond of Milka, to whose good example I owe the correction of my fault."

"I am afraid that you can do nothing. Nevertheless, my grief is so great that I cannot think, so I will tell you what has happened, and perhaps together we can think of some plan that may save us. Listen! Three years ago, when Milka was fifteen, I took her for a trip about the world, and especially to present her in the Kingdom of the Emeralds, which I own and which I thought of giving her when she marries.

"In order to get there one must pass through the realm of a horrible Giant, as wicked as he is ugly. His godmother, Fairy Fury, has taught him all her evil and has made of him a powerful magician. He saw Milka, and, taking a fancy to her beauty and sweetness, asked me for her hand. Naturally, I refused indignantly; but instead of being angry, he heaped upon us his attentions, as a person very sure of getting his wish in the end.

"Our good sovereign, the Queen of the Fairies, by orders to which I resign myself humbly, has disposed that during the twenty-four hours of the twenty-ninth day of February, of leap years, I lose my magic power. Until then it had not mattered to me; I spent the time sleeping. You will remember that precisely the year of which I am speaking was leap year. I hurried my trip, wishing as always to spend this day in my castle. I was sleeping soundly when a servant came to wake me, bringing me a letter which needed an immediate answer. The letter stated that a very powerful Fairy waited for me at the foot of the Green Rocks, with the object of telling me something of great importance to me.

"I ran quickly and, when it was too late, I saw with real terror the Giant Patizambo waiting for me, mounted on a colt with wings—a gift from his godmother, the Fairy Fury, and a direct descendant of the great Pegasus, the horse of Apollo. I was lost! If I fell into his hands defenseless, I would never recover my power until I was free from him. I wished to fly; but the Giant, with his large arms, lifting me like a feather, placed me beside him on the famous colt, and a quarter of an hour later we arrived at his palace.

"Immediately he dispatched a messenger with a letter for my daughter, in which the monster assured her that only by marrying him could I be free. The sweet Milka, rather than have me lost, acceded to

his horrible petition, and in proof of it gave her ring to the messenger. When he arrived, the Giant, in his joy, set me free; but before leaving I had to discuss with him the conditions of the marriage. As Milka was so young, Patizambo agreed to wait three years, and so we signed the contract.

"Knowing the immense vanity of the monster I tried to find in that some way to save Milka. You know my fabulous wealth, and when I offered all of that as a marriage gift to my daughter, in addition to the rich Kingdom of the Emeralds, it may not seem strange to you that the Giant, feeling himself humiliated and not wishing to be outdone in generosity, said to me: 'I shall do more than you! I promise you—and here I write it over my signature—to give to Milka the three things that she asks of me for a wedding present, be they what they may, value what they may value; and so sure am I of keeping my promise that if I do not do it the marriage contract may be broken and I will return Milka's ring, the pledge of our agreement.'

"He signed the paper and gave it to me, keeping a copy for himself, and we parted.

"As Patizambo had not again returned to speak of the matter we thought that he had forgotten it. Vain illusion! This morning there arrived on the winged colt a messenger asking for the fulfilment of our promise.

"You see, my son, that we have reason to cry

bitterly. One sole hope we have—that the Giant cannot give to Milka the three things that she asks for. In that case, as I have told you, the fatal contract will be broken. Now we will think together if there exists any object which his power united with that of his godmother cannot procure."

"Sir," said the Prince, "so greatly does your story grieve me that with pleasure would I again assume my black face, my ears of a donkey, and even my humpback, if by so doing I could save my loved Milka."

"Thank you, my son. I know your good heart; and I value it so much that if by any means we escape the Giant, it will give me pleasure to have you marry my daughter."

"Never had I dared dream of such joy!" the Prince exclaimed happily. And forgetting their sad circumstances, he began one of his famous dances, which was so grotesque that it made the Genie and his daughter laugh in spite of the anguish they suffered.

VII

THE THREE GIFTS

THE little green man thought deeply for a few moments.

"Each day," said he, "one of us will name the

gift that Milka must ask of Patizambo. We will see if *something* cannot be thought of to accomplish what we all so greatly wish. To-day I shall try."

He sent for the messenger, who lost no time in presenting himself.

"Salute your master in our name," said the Genie, "and tell him that my daughter desires a dress made of the rays of the sun."

When the servant arrived at the palace of Patizambo with this message, the godmother of the Giant, who happened to be present, said:

"Nothing more than that?"

And laughing harshly, she grabbed a broom and mounted it, and in a few minutes she had sailed up to the Sun. After a thousand compliments she begged him to give her some of his rays. The splendid Sun, who is very generous, did as he was requested; and Fairy Fury, mumbling some magic words, wove them into a gorgeous dress and quickly put it into a box which she carried for the purpose.

Three days later the messenger once more arrived at the Green Rocks, where every one was awaiting him in great anxiety, hoping against hope that the Giant could not carry out his promise. But when the box was opened they had to shut their eyes, so dazzling was the splendor of the luminous dress. Their grief was boundless. Not being able to stand the brilliant light, they hastily replaced the dress in its box, and once more fell into deep thought.

"It is your turn now, daughter," the little green man said presently. "I can think of nothing, nothing!"

"I wish," said Milka, "a machine that in fifteen minutes can spin, weave, and make a dress completely, before my eyes."

The messenger, with a low bow, left the room.

One week later he returned, bringing to Milka a little wooden case. Hope was born once more in the hearts of all three of them, as they believed it impossible that what she had asked could be contained in so small a box. They had the servants bring them a great quantity of flax, and then they opened the little case.

Immediately there jumped from it a multitude of tiny workers, hardly larger than ants, and a little wheel that moved only when the case was opened; and in ten minutes, with marvelous rapidity, on their wee distaffs they spun the flax, passing it quickly then to their lilliputian looms where it was turned into soft and beautiful cloth, from which was cut and sewed a dress so excellent that the most famous modiste in Paris could not have made it so well.

Poor Milka fell to the floor in dismay, believing herself lost beyond all hope.

During all this, Narciso had disappeared. Where was the Prince? Seeing that the power and magic of the Giant was so great, and thinking that if the

Fairy of Hope did not help, Milka was lost to him, Narciso had gone to his room and called to his aid his powerful protector, kissing the anchor hanging from the chain which the Fairy had given him in the palace of Aurora.

Scarcely had the Prince called her name when the Fairy appeared, more beautiful than ever, and after congratulating him on his good conduct asked him what he wanted. The Prince told her his great trouble, begging her to help them vanquish Patizambo. The good Fairy was not deaf to his pleading, and proved once more that not in vain does one call on Hope. She assured the Prince that on the following day the Giant would return Milka's ring.

"Call the messenger," said she, "and tell him that Milka wishes to have some gloves that will be suitable to wear with her magnificent dresses. These must be made of the most beautiful skin in the world, and as no skin is so beautiful as that which covers the hands of Patizambo, she begs that he have it made into the gloves which she requests."

The Prince thanked his precious protector; and calling the messenger he repeated to him what the Fairy had said.

The fury of the Giant is impossible to describe. When at last his rage had calmed sufficiently for him to speak, he gave to the messenger Milka's ring and the copy of the marriage contract, torn into pieces.

"Go at once to the Green Rocks," he screamed,

"and tell them that, so far as I am concerned, I would not marry a maiden so bloodthirsty and cruel, and I thank my good stars that I have discovered her bad instincts in time to prevent the great misfortune of becoming her husband!"

VIII

THE FAIRY OF HOPE

WHEN the messenger arrived and delivered the ring and the torn contract, the immense joy in the Palace of the Green Rocks can be imagined.

So great was it that the little green man, in spite of his many years, joined his dancing with that of the Prince and Milka. Then he called his good friend, the Fairy of Hope, to thank her for the great service she had done them. His immense grief as a father had dulled for the time his intelligence, and if the Fairy had not thought for him, the beautiful Milka would have been lost.

Hearing the call of the Genie, the powerful Fairy came, wearing in his honor a rich green dress woven of the leaves of ivy and honeysuckle.

"You do not need to thank me," she said graciously to the Genie. "If I should ever need you, surely you would run to my aid as quickly as I have come to yours. Moreover, Milka is my god-

child and I am obliged to protect her. And now I wish also to bless her wedding. I am much pleased with her marriage to Narciso, who has made himself worthy of her."

A few days later the wedding of Milka and Narciso was celebrated with great pomp. Among the guests invited by the Fairy of Hope were Aurora and Bradamor, and the good King and Queen. And the Genie of the Green Rocks did not forget to invite Narciso's father and mother, the King and Queen of the Rhododendrons, and his five brothers. These monarchs, who were now very old, cried with happiness, kissing their son whom they thought never to see again.

As a memento of so great a day, the Fairy and the Genie gave to those invited to the sumptuous wedding, not the usual boxes of wedding-cake, but huge baskets of gold filled with precious stones; and upon the poor for miles around, the Genie showered his wealth and the Fairy bestowed her most valuable gifts, so that all in the kingdom might rejoice and be glad.

VII

THE FAIRY AND THE PRINCE

I

THE STORK'S GRATITUDE

LONG, long ago, in the time of the Genii and the Fairies, there ruled over the Empire of the Red Islands a King and Queen so good that the people called them Queen Bondadosa (Bountiful) and King Amable (Kindness).

Powerful, wealthy, loved by all their subjects, they lacked only one thing to make them supremely happy. That was the birth of a little son, whose baby laughter would liven the great marble halls of the royal palace. The Fairies had remained deaf to all their ardent pleadings for a little Prince.

One afternoon when Bondadosa was walking in the garden she heard a moaning, and when she ran to the spot from which the sound seemed to come she saw a lovely stork entangled in a clump of briars. Without hesitating a moment because of the sharp thorns, Bondadosa gently pulled the briars apart and set the bird at liberty. But instead of flying off, the stork made a low bow before the astonished Queen.

"I know what you want more than anything in the world," it said. "To show my gratitude for your kindness to me, I promise that within a few

months you shall have what you so strongly desire."

Then spreading its wings, it flew up and away, in the direction of the moon.

The Queen did not for an instant doubt that the bird would keep its promise. In a small room opening off of her own, she prepared a little golden cradle covered with dainty lace and ribbon, so that it would be ready to receive the baby Prince when the stork brought him. But she said nothing to the King, wishing to surprise him.

Every night when the Queen went to bed she would open wide the window of the baby's room; and one morning, hearing a noise that sounded like a soft flapping of wings, she jumped from her bed and rushed in to the golden cradle. There, to her immense joy, lay a smiling pink baby! The Queen grabbed him up, quickly dressed him in some of the clothes she had prepared, and ran to show him to the King.

The rejoicing throughout the Empire of the Red Islands is impossible to describe; for the people loved their King and Queen and they were happy to know of the good fortune that had come to their rulers.

To celebrate the birth of the Prince Deseado (Desired), the King ordered that a great feast be prepared, in which the poor people of the realm might join with the rich, so that all might rejoice together.

The King and Queen begged the Fairy of Kindness to be the godmother of their little son; and she consented, giving to the baby many lovely gifts. Before leaving, she said to them:

"I have bestowed upon your boy the gifts of valor, and intelligence, and kindness; but it is you, his mother and father, who must develop these in him. In time, bad training can kill even the best natural inclinations. I shall return sometime when you least expect me; and if, with too much indulgence, you have destroyed the gifts which I now give him, I shall punish you as you deserve!"

With those words, the Fairy disappeared.

For a while the King and Queen were sad and thoughtful; but they soon recovered their good spirits, promising each other that they would use the utmost care and make any sacrifice in order to train the little Prince in the best possible way.

As the baby grew he became each day more beautiful and more intelligent. He was quick in understanding anything that was shown to him; and his many attractions fascinated every one who saw him. As a consequence he heard nothing but flattery. Now, there is nothing so bad for any one as continued praise, and it began to awaken in the Prince vanity and pride.

His parents were blind to these developing traits; and because of their great love for him they never thought of contradicting him or scolding him. And

so this child, with all the splendid gifts that would have made him a good and lovable boy, was petted and flattered and praised until he turned into such a horrid creature that no one could go near him without finding him in a violent temper. His subjects, whispering among themselves, nicknamed him Prince Irascible.

II

THE INSUFFERABLE PRINCE

DESEADO grew, and as the years passed he became more and more unendurable because of his violent character. One day he wanted the pages to catch him a linnet that sang at the top of a very high oak-tree. Furious because they did not bring it at once, when a servant did hand it to him he threw it with such rage against the marble floor that the poor linnet was instantly killed.

Another day the Prince was romping with a valuable little dog, and when he suddenly got tired of the puppy's playful affection he became so furious that he gave the dog a vicious kick that all but killed it.

The King had given his son a little burro, which was the admiration of all the children. Every afternoon, mounted on the burro, Deseado would ride up and down the shady avenues in the royal

park. One day when he had been riding much longer than usual, the burro stopped a moment to nibble at some tempting grass. Furious, the Prince jumped off and grabbed up a stick, and he gave the burro such a beating that the poor animal dropped, half dead.

One morning when Deseado was walking in the country, he met a ragged little girl who was begging alms. The proud Prince paid no attention to her pleadings; and the girl, not knowing who he was, and wishing to make him listen, took hold of his coat with one hand as she held out the other and told him how hungry she and her poor mother were. Deseado struck the girl with such fury that she fell to the ground unconscious.

The Prince's tutor was a very intelligent and good young man named Renato, who with his salary supported his aged parents. One day when Deseado refused to study his lesson, Renato talked to him gently; but the Prince, accustomed to the servility and flattery of all the people, was furiously indignant with his tutor, throwing him from his presence and demanding that the King and Queen get him some one else, refusing to see Renato again. The poor tutor thus lost his position, and his parents suffered much misery without his accustomed salary.

Not even the people whom he liked were free from the bad traits of this irascible Prince. He loved very much his faithful valet, a very kind old man

who adored him. One afternoon he sent him to look for a certain suit so that he might change his clothes. Undoubtedly, the valet did not understand what the Prince said; for a few moments later he returned with a suit which was not the one Deseado wanted. The Prince grabbed it from his hands, threw it to the floor, and, jumping on it, stamped upon it with choking rage. In his fury he beat the faithful servant so hard that the poor valet was in bed for a whole month thereafter.

Each day the fiery temper of the Prince got worse; and each day the petting and indulgence of his parents was increased. Far from correcting him, they remained blind to his faults.

Deseado was ten years old; Fidel, his page, was twelve. They were playing together at the mouth of a little creek which ran through the park, and as they were stooping over the water, Fidel's coat brushed against the Prince's face. Deseado was furious. Refusing to listen to the page's apology, he struck him with such force that the boy fell into the water and would surely have been drowned had it not been that at that moment a beautiful lady appeared between the trees and, catching Fidel, pulled him to safety.

Deseado watched her in astonishment; but he was even more astonished when she then took him by the hand and compelled him to follow her to the palace. The Prince, who never had obeyed even his parents

or his teachers, walked along beside the beautiful lady as if he were being impelled by some supernatural force.

The King and Queen that afternoon were holding court in the throne room. Suddenly they saw their son approaching with the Fairy of Kindness, whom they recognized instantly. The King and the Queen and all the court bowed courteously; but the Fairy paid no attention to their salutation.

"So this is the way you fulfil the promises you made me!" she exclaimed. "The training that you have given your son is so bad that out of a Prince, good, noble and generous, you have made, with your indulgence and flattery, an insufferable being, who would be a disgrace to you and to all the kingdom if I were not to interfere. You do not know how to be parents—you do not deserve to be; therefore, I shall take Deseado far away from here. If the lessons which he will receive correct his irascible and haughty character, perhaps there may come a day when I will return him to you. But if he does not repent and change his conduct, you never will see him again!"

The King and the Queen fell prostrate before the Fairy, begging mercy, sobbing bitterly, and all the court added their supplications; but the Fairy, apparently indifferent to their pleadings, merely raised to her lips a small gold whistle which was suspended from a chain round her neck.

Immediately there entered through one of the windows a small coach, made of a white calla-lily, drawn by swallows and glow-worms. Taking Deseado in her arms, the Fairy of Kindness stepped into the flowery carriage, and, placing the Prince in the bottom, soon disappeared among the clouds.

III

THE PUNISHMENT

ALL the rest of that day they traveled in their aerial carriage, and during that time the Fairy spoke not a word to her ill-natured godchild. It was long after dark when the swallows stopped in front of a magnificent and brilliantly lighted palace, and the Fairy descended from the lily coach, ordering the Prince to do the same. Without another word, she took him to a room where he was locked in after having been given a piece of hard bread and a glass of water. The poor boy cried bitterly, until at last he fell asleep.

The following morning his godmother came to him.

"You have been cruel, irascible, and proud," she said severely; "and in punishment I shall make you suffer what you have caused others to suffer until you learn the truth of those divine maxims which say:

Do not do to another that which you would not wish done to you.

It will be measured unto you with the same measure that you have measured unto others.

"Every fault of yours will be severely punished. Only real repentance and good actions on your part can save you."

The Fairy touched the Prince with her wand, and he was instantly changed into a linnet. Furious, and not knowing on whom to vent his wrath, he flew down and began to peck a farmer who was passing; but the farmer, catching him quickly, threw him violently to the ground.

The horrible agony the Prince felt made him remember the pain he had caused a defenseless little bird one afternoon; and he began to see the evil that egotism and cruelty bring with them, and he regretted sincerely that he had been guilty of such a fault.

Hopping from limb to limb and flying from flower to flower, he spent several days eating anything he could peck up in the country.

One morning he saw a poor old woman laboriously picking up some grains of wheat that had fallen out of a heavy sack which she was taking to a nearby mill. Impelled by the noble impulses of his heart which already had begun to manifest themselves, he hopped down near the old woman and with his little beak began to pick up the wheat so rapidly, flying to

drop it into the sack, that very soon not a grain remained on the ground.

"May you be well rewarded, dear little bird," the old woman exclaimed, "for the good deed that you have done me!"

On hearing these words, it seemed to the Prince that he felt himself growing. Looking into the pool of a creek that flowed beside the road, he saw with great surprise that he had been transformed into a small white dog. When he looked up the old woman had disappeared, and several little boys came running down the road. Wagging his tail, the white dog ran to greet the boys, jumping up playfully; but one of them, who must have been in a bad humor, knocked him away so violently that he fell to the ground whining in pain. Far from understanding that he had received only just payment for his own previous conduct, the Prince, filled with fury, jumped at his persecutor, intending to kill him; but the boy, giving the dog a kick, sent him whirling a long distance down the road, where he fell, half dead, among the weeds. A very bad night the poor Prince passed, unable to sleep because of his pains; and as he lay there he had time to meditate and to realize how well deserved were all of the punishments which he had suffered.

The little white dog wandered about the country, eating whatever he could find. One afternoon as he came near a large city, he saw, to his horror, a blind

man who was lost and who in trying to find the road was just about to walk over a precipice.

"That poor fellow cannot see," the Prince said to himself. "I will run and help him."

Barking happily, the little dog rushed up to the blind man and, catching the bottom of his overcoat in his white teeth, tugged and pulled until the man turned away from the precipice. Then, very slowly, the little dog guided him into the city, where he was safe among his friends.

"Bless you, dear little dog!" exclaimed the blind man, stooping to caress him.

Deseado tried to respond with an affectionate bark, but from his throat came a loud braying. He was not surprised to find himself now a burro, as he well remembered the beating he had given to his own good-natured animal.

Soon a big, cross-looking woman came along, and seeing a burro standing apparently without any owner, she seized the bridle and climbed upon its back.

Irritated by the weight that bent him down, the burro began to protest by giving kicks and jumps; but that only served to madden the woman, who then beat him so fiercely that he was obliged to move along; but he did it stubbornly, with his head bent low. They came at last to a small house, where he was shut into a stable and given a handful of hay. Every day, then, he was taken out in the morning,

piled high with heavy sacks and forced with many blows to carry them from one place to another; when night came he was shut up again in the stable, where, tired out, he stood and munched his hay. There he was able to realize the injustice and the bad treatment that such animals have to suffer; and with all his heart he was sorry that he had not been more kind to them.

One morning some baskets of eggs were strapped upon him, and, without any reason whatever, his cross owner gave him a sudden and cutting thwack with her stick. Furious, he determined to revenge himself. Dropping to the ground, he rolled over and over, crushing the fragile eggs; but almost at once his good instincts became uppermost—for they were gaining an ever larger place in his heart—and they showed him what trouble his act would probably bring to the woman. Jumping upon his feet again, he started off patiently with the remainder of his cargo, overcoming the anger against his owner which so violently threatened him. Arriving at the farm, the end of his trip, he was relieved of the packsaddle and allowed to rest; and he immediately stretched out in the sun, for he was very sleepy.

On awaking he found with astonishment that he was now a ragged little girl and that he was exceedingly hungry. He jumped up and started toward the village to beg a piece of bread to stay his

hunger. He had not gone very far when from a magnificent house there came a very elegant-looking boy. Deseado extended his hand, begging alms.

"Get out of my sight, you miserable vagabond!" cried the boy, shoving Deseado so hard that he fell to the ground.

Getting up, in pain and in shame, he remembered his own cruelty to the little ragged beggar, and he repented sincerely.

"Fairy of Kindness," he cried, "you do well to punish me, for I am learning the cruelty of my conduct."

Just then a woman came along and, seeing the unhappy and helpless little girl, took her home and gave her something to eat and told her that she might remain and help the servant. Deseado accepted gladly the position the good woman offered, and he did perfectly and cheerfully everything he was ordered to do.

One night he was awakened from a deep sleep by the red glare from a big fire. His first thought was flight; but remembering the woman who had fed and sheltered him, his gratitude overcame his fear. The flames were now eating the hall. Jumping from his bed, Deseado plunged through them and reached the room of his protector, who was already overcome by the smoke. Grabbing her in his arms, he found that his strength had been remarkably increased, for he carried her without any trouble to the home

of a friend, running back then to the scene of the disaster. The ruins and the fire had disappeared, and in its place stood a magnificent palace. As no one seemed to guard the doors, the Prince entered; but scarcely had he taken three steps when he felt some one touch him on the shoulder and, turning, he saw a servant in livery bowing before him.

"Sir," the lackey said, "undoubtedly you forget that His Majesty waits."

Deseado, looking up, saw in a mirror that he had been transformed into a fine-looking young man, modestly dressed.

He followed the servant into a sumptuous room, where a child of about ten years stared at him coldly and haughtily. The parents of this proud young Prince stepped forward, and the King began to speak to Deseado:

"Here is your pupil. You will soon see his extraordinary intelligence and his quick grasp of your lessons. Teaching him will be very little work for you; but we prohibit your punishing or correcting him: we will do that ourselves."

Deseado found his pupil insupportable. He never knew a lesson; he treated his teacher with the utmost insolence; and through it all Deseado had to remain quiet, under pain of severe punishment from the King.

One afternoon when he was walking in the coun-

try with his pupil, they came upon a poor little ragged boy who was crying bitterly.

"What is the matter?" asked Deseado, stopping a moment.

"Oh, sir," sobbed the child, "my mother is dying of hunger. She is so ill she cannot work. We live in a hut in the middle of the woods. Have pity! Give me only a few pennies!"

And the boy held out his hand imploringly toward Deseado's pupil.

"If your mother cannot work, go do some work yourself!" the haughty Prince answered in a tone of great disgust. "Pérhaps you think we have to support all the beggars around here!"

"I have tried to get work," the child said between sobs; "but I am so small that no one will give me anything to do. And my mother is dying!"

The boy broke into fresh weeping, but controlled himself enough to extend his small, thin hand once more.

"Have pity!" he begged.

"You insolent thing! Be gone!" exclaimed the Prince in irritation, turning away from the child.

"Oh, Your Highness," Deseado interceded, "do you believe that God will do to us the same that we do to our neighbor?"

"Who are you, miserable wretch, to preach to me!" stormed the Prince; and raising his cane he

brought it down with a thwack across Deseado's shoulders—and Deseado dared not say a word.

When they returned to the palace and the King learned what had happened, he sent a lackey to tell Deseado that in punishment for his daring to admonish the Prince, his dinner would be served in his room that evening.

Poor Deseado was very hungry: in the middle of the day, through one of the caprices of the Prince, he had missed his luncheon; and he had not eaten much breakfast. But in spite of that, when a servant brought in a tray of rich food, he thought of the little hungry boy in the woods and his mother dying for the want of something to eat. Putting all the food into a basket, he concealed it under his big coat and slipped out of the palace. Fortunately no one interfered with him and he arrived without mishap at the hut of the poor woman and her little boy.

The tears of gratitude of the starving woman were sufficient reward to Deseado for his generous sacrifice.

"There is no greater happiness," he thought, as he left the hut, "than that which comes from doing some one a kindness. How stupid I have been not to realize that for such a long time! If some day the good Fairy pardons me, how I shall enjoy bringing happiness to those who need it!"

When he arrived at the palace he was sent for by the King, who, having learned of Deseado's visit

to the hut, believed that it was meant as a lesson to the Prince.

"You are dismissed," the King said briefly, "and must leave the palace this very night. That is all."

IV

FURTHER ADVENTURES

FOR a long time Deseado wandered through the forest, until at last, feeling tired, he sat down on a hill of moss under a large tree and soon fell fast asleep. When he woke, his tiredness, far from being diminished, seemed much greater, and he felt, moreover, extremely weak. This troubled him greatly, for weakness was a most unusual thing for him; nevertheless he got up and continued his walking through the woods.

Soon he saw at the top of a hill a small white house, which he thought must belong to a farm. He started up the hill at once, without being able to understand the great weariness that climbing the hill caused him. In front of the little house stood a strong-looking laborer.

"Ah, good fellow, come along!" he called to Deseado. "Surely you are the old man my master is expecting."

On hearing the world "old," the Prince at once

understood the cause of his weakness and extreme tiredness. Disagreeably surprised at this new change in himself, he went up to the door and the laborer took him inside and introduced him to the owner of the farm; and in a few moments it had been arranged that he should go to work at once.

Poor Deseado suffered a great deal there. His masters were not really mean; but they made him do all sorts of jobs that were rough, heavy work for an old man, and they found fault with him and heaped blame upon him if sometimes he failed to do something just right or was a trifle slower than a younger man would have been. They did not consider his age.

With tears in his eyes, Deseado thought of his impatience and rudeness to his faithful old valet, and the pain and sorrow that the old man must have suffered through him. And with these thoughts in his mind, he accepted patiently the heavy work and the scoldings that came to him.

One day Deseado's masters sent him to a neighboring city on an urgent errand; and night already had fallen when he started back, dragging his feet in weariness. Half-way to the farm he heard a sad voice, begging help, and going to see who it was, he found a poor child lying on the ground with a broken leg.

"Oh," the little boy answered to his questions, "I fell, and I am suffering so! I can't get up.

Please help me. Oh, don't let me lie here! If I don't get home soon, my mother will think I have been devoured by the wolves, and she will die of grief. If you will only carry me to our cabin!"

"Where do you live?"

"In the meadow of the poppies."

Deseado was filled with consternation at this reply; for to reach the poppy-field he would have to go a long distance out of his way, and he already was so weary that he doubted whether he could ever reach the child's home even if he should attempt it. Then he thought of the unhappy mother, who would wait in vain for the return of her little boy; and then of the child, who probably would die of the cold or else be eaten by the wolves which prowled about those woods by night.

Tired as he was, Deseado picked up the boy and, holding him painfully in his arms, started off in the direction of the poppies. For a long distance he walked with his burden, until he became so greatly worn out and so weak from hunger that he stumbled over a stone and fell heavily to the ground, the child still in his arms.

On getting up, he saw, to his intense surprise, that neither the child nor the woods existed; and, what was even more astonishing, his pain and fatigue had disappeared and he felt more light and agile, more active than he had been for a long time.

In the distance Deseado saw a light. In his great

joy at being young again, he ran and jumped and skipped toward the light, until he found that it was at the entrance of a sumptuous castle. At that moment the door opened, and a servant in gorgeous livery appeared and asked Deseado what he wanted.

"Work, sir."

The servant looked him over carefully.

"You seem to be a very little fellow to be looking for work. Surely you are not more than twelve years old. Well, I remember now that the Duke's page left yesterday and he may want you. Come with me."

Deseado followed the servant; and when he glanced into a mirror they passed, he saw with great astonishment that he looked precisely like his own little page, Fidel.

The Duke accepted him and put him at once at the command of his little son. This boy was ill-tempered and proud to the extreme, and with his haughtiness he made Deseado suffer untold humiliations and bitterness as well as many painful beatings. Through it all the Prince remained silent—had he not done the same? With humble resignation, he accepted his punishment, corrected completely of his past faults.

One day the little Duke was playing beside a deep pond in the middle of the magnificent garden of the palace, and on reaching for a fragrant water-lily he lost his balance and fell headlong to the bottom of

the pond. The first emotion of the Prince was one of great joy, for now he would be free from the little Duke's insupportable torments. But Deseado had little room for bad thoughts now—the good were fast crowding them out; and the next instant he plunged into the water, to save the life of the Duke at the cost of his own; for the minute he pushed the Duke safely on to the shore, his strength gave out, he became too weak to make another movement. As he sank beneath the water, his last thought was:

"Fairy of Kindness, what more can I do than to give my life for the little tyrant who has caused me so much suffering?"

But when he reached the bottom, before he became unconscious he saw a beautiful young girl, who took him into her arms.

When Deseado recovered consciousness he was lying in a sumptuous bed, and on raising himself he saw, with joy impossible to describe, that the image reflected in the long mirror was his own, improved by an expression of kindness that he had not had at the beginning of his punishment. Jumping out of bed, he found that he was a young man.

"What has happened? Where am I?" he exclaimed.

He threw open a window; and immediately there appeared his godmother, the Fairy of Kindness, who took him into her arms, embracing him tenderly.

"Deseado, you have repented of your faults, you

have corrected your conduct, and you are pardoned! To-morrow I will take you to your own kingdom, where loving parents cry every day of your absence; but first I want to reward you. You were ten years old when I carried you away from the palace; to-day you are eighteen; and as, during the time that you were correcting your faults, you were not able to receive the education proper for a Prince of your rank, I will remedy that by granting to you the marvelous 'Infused Science.' "

The Fairy took a glass of water and put into it fifteen drops from a tightly sealed flask which she took from a cupboard, and this she gave to her god-child.

"Drink this when you are ready for bed to-night," said she; "and to-morrow you will know as much as the wisest men in your kingdom."

V

A TRIÚMPHANT RETURN

EIGHT years precisely had passed since the Prince, the heir to the throne of the Red Islands, had disappeared, carried off by the Fairy of Kindness; and not a single moment did the tears of the King and Queen cease.

To show their sympathy for their beloved rulers

on such a sad anniversary, the entire court gathered in the throne room of the magnificent palace.

Suddenly they heard sweet music; and through an open window there sailed toward them groups of swallows playing tiny instruments, and forming the most delicious orchestra they ever had heard.

The winged messengers, drawing near to the throne where the King and Queen sat, dropped from their small bills roses and flowers of various kinds that in a short time covered the whole room.

The astonished court watched this marvelous scene in silence, until they saw approaching them the precious little coach containing the Fairy of Kindness, and at her side a handsome Prince, whom they at once recognized.

The happiness of the good King and Queen knew no bounds. They never tired of embracing and admiring their son.

At last the Fairy held up her hand for silence.

"The Prince Irascible no longer exists; we have now the Prince Deseado," she said. "I took from this palace an unbearable creature who was a disgrace to the realm; and to-day I bring you a good and noble and dignified young man whose greatest wish will be for the happiness of his parents and of all the people. This great change has taken place in him because he has learned to think of others before thinking of himself. And may his lesson serve to show you that to bring happiness to your

children and to yourselves you should train them with firmness, never with weakness. True kindness must sometimes be severe; but as you wish future happiness you must be inflexible in punishing, at the proper time, faults which smiles and persuasions will not correct."

The King and Queen, moved by the beautiful words of the Fairy, prostrated themselves before her, covering her hands with kisses and tears.

There was great feasting throughout the entire Empire of the Red Islands, to celebrate the return of the prodigal son; for poor and rich alike joined in rejoicing at the happiness of their good King and Queen.

And the Prince Deseado, completely corrected, was ever afterward the joy of his parents and of all their subjects.

VIII

THE MERCHANT'S FORTUNE

I

THE MAGIC FLUTE

IN far remote times there dwelt in the City of the Acacias a rich merchant named Mauro. This good man owned a beautiful country home, Buena Vista, in a suburb of the city, and there he lived with his three children. Armando and Elisa, always merry, kind, and affectionate, heaped nothing but happiness upon their father; but Rufino, the eldest child, caused him the greatest distress.

The loss of his young wife and the bad conduct of Rufino were the only sorrows of the merchant; for his fortune increased daily. Indeed, the people of the City of the Acacias, watching Mauro's constant prosperity, concluded that he must have the protection of some fairy or god. And such, indeed, was the case. He had been so fortunate as once to have helped a Faun of the forests; and this good Faun lost no occasion to prove his gratitude.

. . . . . .

"And what is a Faun?" the youngest readers may wonder.

Thousands of years ago the ancients worshiped

many false divinities, and their myths or fables about these gods have come down to us as mythology. A Faun is one of these mythological creatures. For the sake of the smallest readers, who may not yet have studied mythology, the gods appearing in this story will be explained.

The *Fauns,* deities of the woods, were the friends and companions of the god *Pan.* They were of human form in body, but with the ears, horns, legs, and tail of a goat; just as were the *Satyrs.* The Fauns, however, differed from the Satyrs not only in being much larger but in being good whereas the Satyrs were bad. They lived by preference in the country; and they played the flute with true perfection.

The *Tritons* were deities of the sea, the children of *Neptune,* the god of the waters. The upper part of their body was like that of a man; the lower part like the tail of a fish.

Eolus was the god of the winds.

Eurus was the god of the east wind, and subject to Eolus.

Vulcan was the god of fire and of the forges.

The *Cyclops* were giants. They had only one eye, in the middle of the forehead; and they worked under the orders of Vulcan.

Apollo was the god of poetry and music, and, under the name of *Phoebus,* the conductor of the sun.

Esculapius, the son of Apollo, was the god of medicine.

. . . . . .

Mauro, protected by the powerful Faun, saw his riches increasing day by day; but, day by day also, the evil habits of Rufino increased, until they reached the point where one morning in an access of rage he threatened to kill his father. Mauro, indignant at such conduct, cast his son from the house, forbidding him to return until he could overcome his evil passions; and thereafter the merchant gave all his love and affection to Armando and Elisa. When these two were grown they married the children of a neighbor, as good and as rich as themselves; and soon two little grandchildren heaped still more joy upon that already happy household. Armando's beautiful little son was named Pablo; and Elisa's precious little daughter was called Marita.

But so much happiness could not last forever. A few years went by and an epidemic passed over the land, leaving Armando a widower and Elisa a widow. And they had not stopped grieving when they were threatened by another calamity, equally bitter. Their father, Mauro, now more than a hundred years old, felt that he was nearing the end of his life.

"Dear son and daughter," he said to his children one day, "there are only a few hours left for me;

but before I die I wish to tell you a most important secret."

The old man told them then of his friendship with the Faun, and how the wood-god, because of a service rendered on a certain occasion, had protected him in all his enterprises, commending to Neptune and Eolus his ships when they were filled with merchandise; for this reason, while other merchants were lamenting the loss of valuable cargoes and their best boats, Mauro's always safely reached port.

Then, taking a tiny flute which hung from a chain round his neck, Mauro gave it to Armando.

"If at any time you find yourself in grave trouble," said he, "play a few notes on this flute, the gift of my powerful friend, and he will come to your aid. I beg you to guard this secret as profoundly as I have guarded it; for this is the wish of my great protector. Only one person knows about it—Teresa, the nurse, to whom your mother told it in case we should die while you were too young to understand. And now, my children, call little Pablo and Marita, and kneel down at my bedside, so that I may give you my blessing."

Crying bitterly, they obeyed their father, whom they loved so dearly. And a few hours later his beautiful soul flew to the skies.

No one was surprised, when Mauro's will was read, to find that he had left his entire fortune to

Armando and Elisa, to go, in case of their death, to their children, Pablo and Marita; thus disinheriting entirely Rufino, of whom no one had heard for many years.

II

THE VAGABOND

TWELVE months had passed since the death of the good Mauro. Pablo was now fourteen and Marita thirteen.

One afternoon the children were playing in the garden not far from their parents when suddenly they saw a lively black horse coming toward them at a fast gallop. It stopped at their gate and the rider jumped to the ground and handed Armando a sealed letter.

Quickly breaking the seal, Armando, to his utter amazement, read:

Dear Brother and Sister:

With real grief have I learned of the loss of our dear father. My tears have mingled with your own. A cruel affliction which would not permit me to move was the only thing that kept me from hastening to beg his pardon. From him I could not obtain it; and now, after a year of our immense grief, I have dared to ask that you, dear Brother and Sister, give me your pardon. And to prove that you accede to this great supplication of mine,

I beg that you come with your children to spend a few months in my home by the sea, with my wife, Cristeta, the Countess of Movel, and our son, Heliodoro, who now is fourteen, the age of Pablo.

Time has taken away my faults and has increased the affection I have always felt for you, my only Brother and Sister. It is my love for you that leads me to write to you, begging you to come.

Do not refuse the request of one who waits for you with open arms—your brother

RUFINO.

Armando and Elisa could hardly believe what they had read with their own eyes. But they decided, after long hesitancy, to accept the invitation; so they gave the messenger a letter to Rufino, telling him they would arrive two weeks later.

They believed that repentance of his past evils had led Rufino to seek a reconciliation with his brother and sister. But, alas, such was not the case. It was a wicked desire for vengeance; and in this he was coerced by his wife, who was even more cruel than himself.

What had happened to Rufino during all the years in which no one had heard of him? As the good are always rewarded, sooner or later the bad are punished. Rufino received his just deserts soon after he had been thrust from his father's house. Accustomed to spending recklessly and without thought Mauro's riches, he found himself as poor and miserable as the least of his servants. After a few

days of walking aimlessly through the country, he came at last to a city where, thanks to his education, he found good employment; but this he soon lost because of his bad conduct; and then, wandering from one place to another, he passed several years, until he met the Countess Cristeta.

This cruel woman lived in a sumptuous castle built by the sea and not very far from a beautiful forest, about forty leagues from the City of the Acacias. Cristeta was so ugly and so mean that, in spite of her enormous fortune, she had never met any man who was willing to marry her. It was whispered about the village that she was a mistress of the art of witchcraft; and more than one laborer swore that he had seen her on Saturday nights flying from the chimneys of her castle mounted on a broomstick.

When Rufino, tired of his vagabond life, reached Movel Castle and heard what was said about Cristeta, he was delighted.

"There I shall find my luck!" he exclaimed to himself. "If it is true that the Countess is so wicked, then she and I can understand each other. As to her ugliness—bah!—her immense wealth is so beautiful in my eyes that her own looks will be as nothing!"

Pretending a love that of course he did not at all feel, he infatuated the Countess, and they were married at once. Then, telling her lie after lie about

his father and Armando and Elisa, he soon had her hating them and desiring revenge as strongly as did his own black heart.

Their son, Heliodoro, became as hideous and as wicked as his parents.

Thus were matters when they heard of the death of Mauro and of his will. A neighbor had brought the news from the City of the Acacias and had given full information about Armando and Elisa and their two children.

Rufino and Cristeta were so furious at his having been disinherited that they began at once to scheme vengeance. One thing after another was considered, and abandoned as not being sufficiently cruel. But finally they agreed upon a plan; and as the first step in it, Rufino sent his letter of invitation to his brother and sister.

Armando, after dispatching his reply by the messenger, went to find Nurse Teresa, to tell her of their intended visit.

"Oh, my child!" the old woman exclaimed in terror. "You are noble and good, and you think every one is as you are! God will that you may not repent of what you are about to do! If you had consulted me, I should have told you not to go to Movel; but now it is too late!"

"My good Teresa, your love for us makes you blind. Rufino seems really to have repented. You see that he has thought enough of his own people to

keep in touch with us here at Buena Vista during all the years that we knew nothing of his life. Why, he even knows that I have a son, fourteen years old, named Pablo!"

"Ah, but you see the good side of everything," the nurse replied. "You may find yourself deceived. Remember that I have known Rufino ever since he was born, and I know of what he is capable. Let us hope that I may be mistaken!"

"And if he has truly repented? You will see that you will have to ask his pardon for your uncharitable thoughts. And now, my dear Nurse, begin your preparations for the trip, for we shall go two weeks from to-day. Of course you will come with us. The butler and his wife can take charge of the house in our absence."

III

MOVEL CASTLE

IN a flat and fertile country, overgrown with vegetation, stood the Castle of Movel, with its many turrets of glistening white and red marble pointing upward toward the sky. Surrounding the castle were magnificent gardens, their broad walks lined with pine-trees. On one side, these walks led down to the sea. On the opposite side, and not very far from the castle, extended a dense forest, filled with

giant trees whose leaves of various and brilliant shades formed a picture surprisingly beautiful.

On the date designated by Armando, an elegant carriage stopped before the gate to the castle gardens; and Cristeta, Rufino, and Heliodoro waited there to greet their guests, whom they received with the greatest show of affection.

For a whole month there was feasting and entertaining at Movel; and Armando and Elisa never ceased to chide Teresa for her suspicions.

"Are you not convinced now, dear Nurse?" asked they.

"When I find ourselves back in the City of the Acacias, safe and sound, then I shall believe. Until that time—impossible!"

"Within a few days, then, you shall be satisfied; for you know that, at Rufino's earnest request, we are obliged to shorten our visit."

The truth was that Armando and Elisa wished heartily to return to their home in the City of the Acacias. Try as they might, they could not help but dislike the Countess, although to keep from hurting their brother they pretended to like her.

Pablo and Marita likewise took a strong dislike to Heliodoro, and they wished with all their hearts to be back again in their own Buena Vista. But, obedient always to the wishes of their parents, they carefully hid their dislike and joined cheerfully in all Heliodoro's games.

At last the night before their departure arrived. A great farewell banquet was held at the castle; and soon after it was over, the guests all retired to their rooms, to be ready for an early start in the morning.

A short time after the lights were out and the castle was quiet, Teresa thought she heard a faint moan in Elisa's room, which adjoined her own. Jumping up quickly, she rushed in to her mistress, full of misgivings; and great was her grief to find Elisa lying there, stone dead. The nurse ran to Armando's room; and he too lay dead. Frantic now, she flew to the children's rooms; and found with a joy as great as her grief that Pablo and Marita were sleeping sweetly.

Teresa had been with Armando and Elisa from the time they were born, and she adored them. Now, being a woman of great intelligence, instead of screaming or raising a disturbance, she thought quickly to herself:

"Unluckily, I was right: this is the work of Rufino. But if he thinks I suspect him it might endanger the children, and then I shall lose them as I have their parents."

After thinking hard for a few moments, she exclaimed to herself:

"I shall call the Faun! For the sake of his old friend, he will tell me what I must do."

She hurried again to Armando's room, took from his neck the mysterious flute, which he wore always,

and, slipping out of the house, she went to the nearby woods and blew a few notes on the magic instrument.

IV

THE GRATEFUL FAUN

ALMOST as soon as the last note was sounded, Teresa heard the crackling of dry branches which covered the ground of the woods and she knew that some one was approaching. A moment later she saw a strange, woolly being, the upper part of his body of human form, but with horns, ears, tail, and legs of a goat. In his hand he carried a flute.

Teresa knew at once that it was the Faun for whom she was looking; and she hastened to tell him all that had happened.

"Do not be disheartened," replied he. "Perhaps the evil that Rufino has done may be remedied. I promised my good friend Mauro not to forsake his children; and now the time has come to keep my promise. Run back to the castle. In the room which Rufino calls his laboratory, where he experiments with chemistry and magic, you will see a cupboard, and in the cupboard you will find several boxes which he keeps hidden there. I learned that from overhearing a conversation between him and the Countess one day when they were walking here

in the woods. Lift up the tops of all the boxes, and bring me the one which you find half empty—the powder of that one was mixed last night in Armando's and Elisa's dinner."

"You are right, sir. Now I remember having seen Rufino enter the kitchen just before the banquet, and afterward when the diners were served with small silver dishes containing lark pie, he designated which should go to each person. They must have contained the powder which killed my good master and mistress."

And the unhappy woman began to cry bitterly.

"I repeat," the Faun comforted her, "that the evil may not be beyond remedy; but in order to undo it, it is necessary for me to know what poison has been given them."

"But, sir, it seems impossible for me to do what you ask. Where shall I find the key to this cupboard?"

The Faun pulled a hair from the end of his tail and handed it to the astonished servant.

"Put this into the keyhole, and the lock will turn instantly and without the least noise."

Teresa hastened to carry out the Faun's instructions; and as the forest was very near to the castle, she was able to return to him within an hour, carrying with her a small box of a jet black color.

The Faun sounded a few low and very sweet notes on his reed; and instantly the branches of the trees,

which before had been quiet, began to shake violently, as if blown by a strong south wind.

"What can I do for you?" roared a voice which seemed to come from among the acorns of the oak-trees.

"Eolus, my friend, lend me your wings and carry me in your strong arms to the home of Esculapius."

As Teresa watched, the Faun disappeared, snatched up by the wind; and the great trees of the forest once more became quiet.

Two hours later, the whistling of the wild wind announced the Faun's return, and Teresa hastened to meet him.

"Good news!" he exclaimed, answering the question he saw in the eyes of the unhappy woman. "Esculapius has analyzed this powder, concocted surely by the Countess; and as his science is much greater than hers, we shall be able to remedy in part the harm she has done. Armando and Elisa, in spite of their appearance, are not dead. They are only in a sort of trance, which in twenty-four hours will pass into death if before that time we do not apply the antidote to the poison which has caused it. Take this flask; force a few drops of the liquid it contains between their lips, and with the rest bathe their foreheads and their chests. Armando and Elisa will return to life; but as the poison is very powerful, they will remain in a profound lethargy for the three years that its effects

last; this cannot be overcome. The sleep which the poison produces is so similar to death that it will deceive all the world.

"Ask Rufino to let you take the bodies of your master and mistress back to Buena Vista. Surely he will not dare to refuse you. When you arrive there, have Armando and Elisa put to bed, and let the servants all go on a holiday for an indefinite time, telling them that Pablo and Marita have remained with their uncle. Then, when you are alone, call me."

Teresa thanked the good creature heartily, and seeing that the day was beginning to dawn she ran back to the castle and fortunately arrived before the servants had awakened. She hurried, with the precious flask, to the rooms of Armando and Elisa, and did precisely as the Faun had told her.

Two hours later, with every sign of profound grief, Teresa knocked at the apartment of Rufino and the Countess and told them of the terrible thing that had happened.

Rufino and Cristeta, pretending the deepest sorrow, ran to the rooms of Armando and Elisa, dabbing their eyes often and conspicuously with their handkerchiefs, to appear as if they were weeping.

In the meantime, Teresa went to the children and, making them swear secrecy by the love they bore their father and mother, told them all that had happened, adding, to ease their grief:

"And now, my children, do not cry any more. You, Pablo, are fourteen years old; and you, Marita, are thirteen; and as you are both intelligent and discreet, I have felt it my duty to keep nothing from you. I shall go to the City of the Acacias, to carry out the instructions of the powerful Faun. Within three or four days I shall return, and we then can think what we shall do during the three sad years of waiting. Certainly you cannot remain here. I would gladly take you home to Buena Vista; but Rufino would never consent to that; and so, rather than lose his confidence, I will not suggest it. I am sure that, for some time to come anyway, he would not dare to harm you; for that would bring suspicion upon him as to the death of your parents."

The following day the bodies of Armando and Elisa were carried to Buena Vista; and there Teresa did all that the Faun had instructed her. Then, going to the nearest woods, she sounded a few notes on the little flute.

The Faun came at once.

"Sir," the nurse said, " I have done all that you told me to do."

"That is well. Now get from the house the things that you will need, and touch with this wand all of the domestic animals, so that they will sleep the same length of time as their owners."

A half-hour later Teresa again entered the woods, carrying a few packages and leading by the bridle

a beautiful horse, on which she intended to return to Movel.

The Faun played some delicious notes on his reed, and as if by enchantment there sprang up a very high wall which entirely surrounded Buena Vista and left not even the smallest kind of entrance.

"Now they will be safe," said the Faun. "At the proper time the music from my reed will make the wall disappear, and the wand will wake the animals it has put to sleep. When the three years have passed, wait for me in front of the wall, with the children. If you need me before that time, call me. I never forget a favor that is done me, and I promised Mauro to protect always those that he loved."

"And in the meantime must we remain at Movel?"

"Certainly not! You must leave at once, under whatever pretext you choose. If they do not consent, escape at night from that accursed house, where at this very moment a horrible conspiracy is being plotted against the life of Pablo and the happiness of Marita."

"I understand," said Teresa.

"Surely the plan of this new Cain is to possess himself of all the wealth of his father. As my friend Mauro disinherited Rufino in his will, he cannot have any share in the estate; but after the death of Armando, Elisa, and Pablo, the entire fortune will go to Marita; and now Rufino is planning to

marry her to that odious Heliodoro, so that the wealth will pass into the hands of his son."

Teresa was terrified; for she well knew that the Faun was right. Thanking him again for his great kindness and help, she mounted her horse and made all haste to return to the castle of the Countess Cristeta.

V

THE GENIE OF THE WATERS

AT Movel there awaited Teresa the most cruel of disappointments. Running to the rooms of the children and not finding them, she called Rufino and asked where they were. This wicked man, covering his face with both hands, as if he were suffering the greatest grief, answered her in a sorrowful voice:

"Another horrible calamity has befallen us! My nephew and niece went to play in the woods, and, getting lost without doubt, they must have been devoured by the wild beasts. We have hunted for them everywhere, but they cannot be found."

Poor Teresa, on hearing this, fell to the floor in a dead faint.

What had happened in the short time that the nurse had been away from the castle?

The very day that she left, Rufino and the Count-

ess expected the arrival of one of their ships with a large and rich cargo. Suddenly a furious storm arose; and almost in their very sight the ship was dashed to pieces against the rocks, and all its cargo lost.

Rufino's rage was boundless.

Ancient history records that Xerxes, the famous King of Persia, to take revenge on a violent storm that broke up a bridge of barges across the Hellespont, commanded that the sea be given one hundred lashes with the whip. This same diabolical idea came to Rufino; but instead of ordering the servants to give the lashes, he himself went down to the sea, armed with a long, stout stick.

But scarcely had the first stroke hit the waves when the water separated with a thunderous roar, and there appeared a remarkable little man, whose long white and blue hair floated about him and lost itself among the waves.

"Who dares to disturb my waters?" he roared in a voice like the roar of the sea.

Rufino, terrified, knew not what to answer. At last he said tremblingly:

"Sir, I did not wish to offend you. On the contrary! The fame of your extraordinary talent and great kindness has reached me, and I came to consult you on a very important matter. Not knowing how I could make you hear my voice, I had to call you in this manner."

Now, not even the gods and the fairies are insensible to flattery. The Genie's angry frown changed into a friendly smile.

"What can I do for you?" said he.

"I have a nephew whom I am obliged to get rid of—for reasons too long to explain—and a niece who must marry my son in four or five years. If I am to accomplish both those things, it would be very convenient for me to hide my niece during that time, and thus be sure that no one interferes with my plans. What would you charge me to get rid of my nephew and hide my niece, keeping it all in the greatest secrecy? Only you, with your immense power, could do this for me."

"It shall not be said that you asked in vain a favor of the Genie of the Waters. I will do as you wish. I need a good servant—the fish are stupid creatures and do everything backward. So I shall keep this boy for a servant. But you need not be alarmed: he shall never leave the bottom of the sea. I will take the girl, also, returning her to you at the time specified."

"Oh, no!" Rufino objected quickly. "If you do that, the two cousins will remain together, and that is one of the first things I want to prevent."

"Very well," the Genie amiably agreed. "I have a friend who is the Fairy of the Wandering Star. Every night when she reflects herself in my waters we gossip by the hour; and every five years in one

of her continuous trips she comes to rest between my waves. In two days it will be time for her to come again, and then I shall give the girl to her, to keep until her next visit to me. That seems to me to be a fine plan. Not all the world could guess where to find her. . . . Wait here for me a moment."

The Genie disappeared beneath the waters, and shortly returned with a bunch of seaweed and a handful of little stones.

"Order your cook to make a stew for the children, putting into it this seaweed instead of the usual vegetables. It will give them the power of being able to live under the water or in the atmosphere of the stars. These little stones are for you to use when you want to call me—just drop one between the waves."

Rufino expressed his real gratitude to the Genie, and said good-by to him until the following day.

The next morning Cristeta went very early to call the children, telling them that their uncle wished them to go with him for a walk along the beach. The poor children, without having the least suspicion of harm, jumped gaily out of bed, and, singing while they dressed and talking happily at breakfast, they ran to meet their uncle and skipped along the sands beside him.

When Rufino was some distance from the castle, he slipped one of the little stones out of his pocket and threw it into the sea. The Genie appeared im-

mediately. Shaking his big head of white and blue hair, he caused the waves to heap themselves up in the shape of a large deep shell, which, as it curled forward, engulfed the two children just as Rufino jumped beyond their reach.

Genie and waves and children disappeared; while Rufino, smiling with deep satisfaction, returned to the Countess Cristeta.

VI

THE FAUN'S STRATEGY

WHEN Teresa recovered from her faint, she found herself in bed. Getting up very quietly, and watching her chance to slip out of the house without being seen, she hurried to the forest, crying bitterly. She sounded two notes on the magic flute, and the Faun appeared almost at once.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Pablo and Marita have disappeared!" she sobbed.

The Faun was astonished.

"I did not think they would dare to commit this new infamy so soon," said he.

"Rufino told me that the children had been lost here in this forest."

"That is not true. I know, from my brothers,

that no one has entered these woods. We must look for them on the beach. Come!"

They hurried down to the sea; and as the Faun drew near to the water he began to play a peculiar tune on his reed. They waited a minute, and then there appeared a strange looking creature, the upper part of his body that of a man and the lower part that of a fish.

"Friend Triton," said the Faun, "I want to inquire about something that has happened, I am sure, in your kingdom."

The Faun then told him of the disappearance of Pablo and Marita and of his strong suspicion that they were hidden in the sea.

"I will return here in two hours," said the Triton; "and perhaps I can then tell you what you want to know."

Promptly at the end of the two hours the waves separated and the Triton appeared and called to the Faun, who waited with Teresa on the beach.

"Fortunately," he reported, "I can answer your questions. My powerful father, Neptune, has put this part of the ocean into the charge of a Genie. By a little cleverness I have managed to learn from the Genie what you so anxiously want to know."

He told them of what had happened, and then added:

"I should advise you to think of some way to get the Genie out of the water. Once on land his magic

power would be gone completely, and he would be obliged to return his two prisoners to you. Do not forget that his greatest weakness is vanity."

With that the Triton said good-by and plunged beneath the waves.

The following day the Faun found a place, about a half-league from the castle, where the forest ran down to the sea. Hiding here behind some rocks, he began to sing this song, while he played weird music on his reed:

"O good Genie of the Waters, with your
long and flowing hair
Which so gaily floats, a plume of white
and blue,
I have heard that you are wiser than the
wisest anywhere. . . .
How I'd like to *see* so fine a Djinn as
you!"

The vain Genie, hearing this song and being much pleased, came at once to the surface.

"Whoever you are, fortunate mortal that wishes to see me, here I am!" he cried.

"Powerful Genie, if you would come nearer to these rocks where I am held prisoner," the Faun answered from his hiding-place, "I should be the happiest of men. What are the pains of my captivity compared with the good fortune of seeing you!"

"THE FAUN FOUND A PLACE ABOUT A HALF LEAGUE FROM THE CASTLE"

Now vanity is the enemy of prudence and puts over it a bandage that blinds it. Thus it was that the Genie, not heeding the promptings of reason, left the water and advanced toward the rocks.

Instantly he was surrounded by ten Fauns who sprang upon him from all sides.

"Vanity has caused your end!" they cried. "You have fallen into our power, and never will you return to your own element again!"

"Have mercy!" begged the Genie.

The Fauns, pretending to consult among themselves, whispered from one to the other, all the while holding the Genie fast. Then the leader of them—Mauro's friend—spoke to their prisoner.

"We are inclined to grant you your liberty if, in exchange, you will give us two children whom you are keeping at the bottom of the sea."

"Only one, I have. My friend, the Fairy of the Wandering Star, has taken the girl, and she cannot return her until the end of another five years when she comes again to visit me. But I promise you, by my long white and blue beard, to return the girl to you at that time."

"Very well. But the boy you must bring here at once. If you do not keep your word I will have Neptune punish you!"

The Fauns set the trembling Genie free, and he made haste to plunge beneath the waves. But he was thoroughly frightened, and he lost no time in

returning with Pablo, whom he deposited upon the beach.

"Don't be scared, Pablo," the friendly Faun said to him. "Teresa knows me. She is waiting anxiously for us in the forest. We will hurry to her."

How great was Teresa's joy to have in her arms once more her adored child whom she had thought lost forever! He told them all that had happened to him during his stay at the bottom of the ocean. The Genie had treated him well; his only real unhappiness being to see Marita carried off by the Fairy of the Wandering Star.

"I suppose," said the Faun, "that you would like to free your cousin before the end of the five years. Have you courage enough to undertake a trip to the stars?"

"I would give my life!" Pablo declared staunchly.

"It pleases me to hear you speak like that. Tomorrow I will tell you what you must do. Now hide with Teresa here in this cave where you will find food and whatever you may need."

And pushing aside some thick bushes, he showed them the opening to a large cavern beneath the rocks.

Astonished and delighted, Teresa and Pablo entered the cave. To their great surprise, they saw that it was brilliantly lighted with millions of fireflies which formed themselves into fancy patterns over the ceiling; and in the center stood a stone ta-

ble, well laden with delicious food. But, more extraordinary even, Pablo found that the muddy and torn clothes which he had worn when he was brought up from the bottom of the sea had disappeared, and in their place he was dressed in a new and very elegant suit; the strange thing was, he did not know when the change took place.

They ate with good appetites; and when they finished, table and food disappeared, and in their stead were two enticing beds. Pablo and Teresa were very tired after so much excitement, and they soon were sound asleep.

VII

THE FAIRY OF THE WOODS

VERY early the following morning the Faun appeared. Pablo and Teresa ran to meet him and began to express their gratitude; but he interrupted them.

"It is not to me that you must give thanks, but to my good friend, the Fairy of the Woods, to whom this cave belongs. It is the entrance to the Fairy's palace, where Teresa will have to remain until Pablo returns with Marita. The Fairy has consented to have you stay here; but we have decided that you must go to Movel this afternoon. It will be better

not to let Rufino and the Countess suspect that we know all of their infamous doings, for when the time comes for justice, their punishment will be all the greater. . . . To explain your long absence from the castle, tell them that you have been hunting for the children, but without any success; and now, free from your other duties, you have accepted a position with an immensely wealthy woman who wishes to rent Buena Vista for five years. You know Rufino's avarice; he will very gladly lease the place; for he does not expect the return of Marita before that time, and he will get a good million escudos—which the Fairy will give you to pay the rent. The reason of this deception is to make sure that Rufino and the Countess do not go to Buena Vista and find out what has happened there; for Cristeta, aided by her magic, could soon learn all the rest. So you see it is best not to awaken her suspicions."

"Oh, how can Pablo and I show our gratitude for your wisdom and your kindness!" exclaimed Teresa.

The Faun was looking beyond them.

"Behold," he said, "the one who on this occasion should receive your thanks."

Turning quickly, Teresa and Pablo saw the loveliest of visions. In the entrance to the cave, in all her splendor, stood the Fairy of the Woods, smiling upon them. She was very young and extraordinarily beautiful. Her dress, of a material so fine and so light that it resembled luminous vapor, was

woven of the petals of roses and jasmines adorned with sparkling dewdrops. Upon her golden hair she wore a diadem of sapphires that glittered like the rays of the sun.

Teresa and Pablo had fallen upon their knees at the feet of this exquisite creature; and with a grace that had in it the rhythm of music she lifted them to their feet.

"The Faun, my companion and friend," said she, "has told me of all your misfortunes; and because of my interest in you I shall become your protector."

With these words, she touched a nearby oak with her wand and it instantly was turned into an elegant carriage filled with sacks of gold and drawn by two zebras.

"Here," she smiled, turning to Teresa, "is the money you are to offer Rufino for the rent of Buena Vista. Step into the coach. But return soon to say good-by to Pablo. During your absence we will instruct him in what he has to do."

You may imagine the astonishment of Cristeta and Rufino to see Teresa driving up in such a strange and elegant vehicle. As the Faun had predicted, Rufino accepted instantly the offer to rent Buena Vista for a million escudos, and without hesitating he signed the contract which Teresa gave him.

Two hours later when the nurse stepped out of the coach in the forest, carriage and zebras disappeared by enchantment.

During her absence at Movel, the Faun and the Fairy had been instructing Pablo as to what he should do on the long and dangerous trip which he was about to undertake. At last the Fairy gave him a strong sword and a small flask.

"Drink part of the liquid which this contains," she said. "It is a wine which I made myself, and it has the marvelous virtue of enabling you to live without food or water for three years. Have Marita drink the remainder of the wine when you find her. The sword is a gift to me from Vulcan; it was made in his forges by the Cyclops. If you find yourself threatened with any danger, the sword will help you, for there is not in the whole world any weapon to equal its strength and power."

Pablo, thanking the lovely Fairy, drank a small quantity of the wine, and put the flask safely away in his pocket, strapping the sheath of the sword tightly to his belt. When Teresa arrived, he was ready to start.

While the nurse was embracing Pablo and bidding him good-by between her tears, the Faun played a sweet melody on his reed, calling to the God of the Winds.

Soon the trees of the forest began to shake violently, doubling themselves over as if swept by a hurricane, and Eolus appeared before them, in the form of an old man with a long white beard.

"What do you want?" roared he, in a truly wind voice.

"I beg you, powerful sir, to carry this boy, who is my friend, to the Wandering Star. She flew toward the East. And I beseech you to protect the boy and return him to me, safe and sound, with his cousin, whom he is going to seek."

"With much pleasure I shall do it, my friend. But do not forget that it is a long trip. The Star travels with lightning speed, and we may lose time in trying to overtake her. Also you must consider the immense distance that separates us. It will take more than a year to get up to her realm, and another year to return to the earth; so do not expect to see the boy again for about three years. At that time I myself will bring him to you. Did you say that the Wandering Star went toward the East?"

"Yes, Sir Eolus."

"Eurus!" whistled and howled and roared the powerful God of the Winds with all his mighty strength. "Take this boy!"

The East Wind, in the form of a winged youth, swooped down and caught Pablo into his arms; and in another instant Eolus and Eurus and Pablo had disappeared and the trees of the forest regained their calm.

VIII

THE WANDERING STAR

AS Eolus had said, it took the East Wind more than a year to climb up to the realm of the stars; but during that time Pablo suffered no discomfort from either hunger or thirst, thanks to the wine brewed by the Fairy of the Woods. They passed the Moon, the Milky Way, the Ring of Saturn, they passed near the constellation of the Great Bear, marveling at things more strange than one could ever even dream of. At last they came to the abode of the Wandering Star.

"We are lost!" wailed the East Wind. "Our trip has been all for nothing!"

"Why?" asked Pablo in surprise.

"Your mortal sight does not permit you to see yet the gigantic dragon that guards the entrance to the realm of the Wandering Star."

"Oh, is that all? You will see that we easily can pass that monster."

At that moment their feet touched the ground they so long had been seeking, and the infuriated dragon rushed toward them, his enormous jaws opened to devour Pablo. But the boy was ready. As the dragon got within reach he thrust into its throat the sword of Vulcan; and the beast fell dead at their feet.

Several days were spent in finding the Star, who wandered from one place to another in her immense realm; and nowhere could Pablo find any trace of his cousin. At last, in the very middle of the realm, they came upon a palace built all of glass; and in it, all alone, they saw Marita, sad and crying.

But how could they get to her? There were neither doors nor windows to this strange palace; not even the smallest hole or crack where the wind could enter.

Eurus, whistling a mournful tune, called Eolus to his aid.

"What is the matter?" asked the God of the Winds.

Eurus told him their difficulty.

With a voice as sweet as a summer's zephyr murmuring through the trees, Eolus called to Apollo.

"My friend, come to my aid! Phoebus, turn this boy for a few hours into a ray of the sun!"

Immediately Pablo, now a sunray, penetrated the glass of the palace and kissed the golden hair of his cousin.

"How happy the sunshine seems to-day!" Marita exclaimed aloud.

And with astonishment she heard a well-loved voice answer her:

"It is because to-day there enters with the sun, hope and love."

"Pablo! Is it you?" she cried. "Or is it that I am going mad with happiness? Where are you?"

"Right beside you, changed into a sunray. I have come to find you. Tell me, Marita, have you suffered much? What has happened to you?"

"Oh, at first I thought I should die of grief, my pain was so great at being separated from all those I love. The Fairy of the Wandering Star is not unkind. She comes to see me every day and brings me exquisite presents, and promises to return me to the earth sometime. This hope has sustained me, and —H'ssh! I hear her coming!"

"With whom are you talking?" the Fairy asked as she entered.

"With whom do you think I am talking, good Fairy, when I see no one? I have been telling my grief to a sunray!"

"Poor little girl! When I see you so sad I repent of what I have done."

"Then why do you not return me?"

"It is impossible. I have given my word, and I must keep it. I have brought for you to-day," she added, changing her tone, "some delicious candy. I am sorry to leave you sooner than usual: I have just received some important news that compels me to go at once. My dragon guardian, which was supposed to be immortal, has been found dead. I must go to see if I can learn the cause of this unbelievable

happening. Good-by until to-morrow, my child."

And the Wandering Star disappeared.

When Pablo thought that she was well out of hearing he came nearer to Marita.

"I killed the dragon," he whispered, "with a powerful sword made in Vulcan's forge and given to me by the Fairy of the Woods, who protects us."

Pablo then told his cousin all that had happened in her absence.

"Now," he added, "it is necessary for us to escape before the Fairy discovers my presence and hides you where I could never find you."

"But how can I get out of this palace! There is no opening, not even the tiniest."

"Ask the Fairy to let you walk in the gardens that surround this glass house. As the wall is so high, she will have no fear that any one can get in. Perhaps she will consent to your going for a few minutes to-morrow. If so, Eolus, the God of the Winds, will grab you into his strong arms and, together, we will return to the earth. Before beginning the trip, which will last for more than a year, I must have you drink some magic wine which the Fairy of the Woods gave me, so that you will not know either hunger or thirst. But now the sun is setting and I must hurry away, or I might be returned to my human form within this crystal palace and the Fairy would discover me."

When the Wandering Star came to visit Marita the following morning, the girl begged to spend a short while in the garden.

"If that will lessen your grief," the good Fairy replied, "there is no reason why you should not go. You may stay there an hour; but at the end of that time I must shut you up again in the palace."

The Fairy touched a button quite hidden from human eyes and the walls slowly separated, disclosing a door which she opened with a tiny glass key hanging from her belt. Passing through the door, Marita found some broad steps, which she made haste to run down, into the garden.

As soon as the child was alone, the Wind, loosing his furies, swept down into the garden and, enveloping Marita in a whirlwind, carried her upward through the air.

When, the following night, the Fairy of the Wandering Star reflected herself in the waters of the sea, she told her friend, the Genie, what had happened.

"You were not to blame," he said generously. "I could not guard my prisoner either. Beings with greater power than ours are protecting the children, and it is useless for us to strive against them."

IX

THE LONG SLEEP

FOR hours at a time Teresa would stand at the entrance to her cave, straining her eyes to see the arrival of her beloved children.

Then one sunshiny afternoon in spring, when the air was warm and calm, the trees in the forest suddenly began to tremble in a violent hurricane, and between the whistling of the winds came the music of happy laughter. A moment later Pablo and Marita were in Teresa's arms. Pablo was now seventeen and a fine looking boy; Marita was sixteen and as beautiful as the sun.

Teresa could not tire of showering them with kisses and caresses; but after their first greetings were over she thought of their kind friend, the Faun, and immediately sounded a few notes on her small flute. Not only the Faun but the Fairy of the Woods answered her call; and Teresa and the children could not sufficiently express their thanks to them and to the powerful Eolus.

The time for the end of the sleep of Armando and Elisa was approaching, and the Faun decided that they should all go to Buena Vista as soon as the children had rested from their long trip.

On the day and at the hour agreed upon, the Faun,

the Fairy of the Woods, Teresa, and the two children met in front of the high wall that surrounded Buena Vista. From the Faun's reed came a few rich notes, and immediately the wall fell with a crash and disappeared into the earth. Without stopping to marvel at this, Teresa and the children ran toward the house, at the very instant that Armando and Elisa came slowly down the steps.

The brother and sister looked about them in bewilderment; and when they saw their big children they were still more astonished. Pablo and Marita threw their arms about their parents and kissed them again and again.

"But tell me," Armando said, when at last he could speak, "how is it that last night we went to sleep in Movel and to-day we wake up in Buena Vista? And how is it that you children have grown so much in one night? And you, Teresa, tell me where all the servants are. And who are these friends with you?"

The Fairy of the Forest, stepping forward, told him all that had happened during the three years that had elapsed since their banquet at Movel.

The astonishment of Armando and Elisa knew no bounds; and they shed bitter tears to think of the treachery of Rufino and the suffering of their children. When the Fairy finished her story, they thanked her and the Faun for their kind protection.

"Our protection was a reward for your own

goodness," the Fairy said; "and in the week that I shall pass with you, sharing in your happiness, I shall see that the proper punishment is meted out to those who deserve it. As time passes so swiftly I will begin at once on the plan I have in mind. Come here, Teresa!"

The nurse obeyed, and the Fairy said something to her in a low voice.

Immediately Teresa set off to look for the servants, who had been given a holiday of indefinite length. Aided by the Fairy's magic, she had no difficulty in finding them; and they at once returned, very contentedly, to Buena Vista, and took up their former work there.

Then Teresa ordered a carriage from the stables, and in it she set out for Movel.

X

THE INVITATION

RUFINO and Cristeta, thoroughly enjoying the fruits of their crime, waited happily for the moment when Marita would be returned and they could marry her to Heliodoro and thus be sure of Mauro's immense fortune. They were not without occasional alarm; for when Rufino dropped more of his little pebbles into the sea, the Genie failed to

appear; but the Countess laughed away Rufino's fears.

"Bad news always travels fast, you know. If anything had occurred to upset our plans, you would soon know about it. The Genie, of course, doesn't pay any attention to your calls, fearing, perhaps, that you want to take back the boy, and he doubtless finds Pablo a very good servant to keep. When the proper time comes he will return Marita."

One afternoon when Rufino, Cristeta, and Heliodoro were sitting on the terrace, they saw a coach stop before their gate. They were much surprised, because no one ever came to visit them. The poor hated them for their cruelty and avarice, and the rich for their vanity and detestable character. Their astonishment reached its highest point when they recognized Teresa stepping out of the coach.

This unexpected visit caused them a little uneasiness; but it was quickly dissipated when Teresa greeted them amiably.

"My mistress, the wealthy woman who has rented Buena Vista, sent me," the nurse said, "to invite you to a reception which she will give three days from now in honor of her niece and only heir, who will then be sixteen."

"Thank your mistress, and tell her that it gives us much pleasure to accept her invitation."

They asked Teresa to stay a while; but the nurse, with a plausible excuse, hurried away.

Cristeta put on the most gorgeous gown of all her wardrobe, and her most expensive jewels; and, thus adorned, she and Rufino and their son set off in a magnificent coach for Buena Vista, the home of their victims, without remorse entering for even one instant into their stony hearts.

During the drive, Rufino, who had been thinking deeply for a few moments, suddenly exclaimed:

"What a pity that Heliodoro must marry Marita! Perhaps this heiress has even greater riches—and it would not be a hard matter to win her!"

"We may find a way to get both of them," Cristeta observed from her corner in the carriage.

"And why not?" Rufino turned to his son. "What do you think, Heliodoro?"

"Of course we must have both! I shall marry this girl and get her wealth, and then when the time approaches for the return of Marita I will take my wife off on a long trip so that she will know nothing about the matter; and the day that the Genie of the Waters gives me Marita I will ask him to take her back to the bottom of the ocean, to live forever with her Pablo. You see how generous I am," he added with a cruel smile; "instead of having her killed, I send her to one she loves!"

Heliodoro laughed hideously.

"In the meantime," he finished, "my mother, with her marvelous ability, can forge a will supposed to be signed by Armando and Elisa, saying that Buena

Vista is to go to their brother in case of their children's death."

"You have a great brain, my son," said Rufino. "Perhaps your plan may not be a bad one. According to the laws of this country, ten years after the mysterious disappearance of the owners of a fortune, the State cannot touch it, and the administration of it falls to the nearest relative; so we do not have to fear that any outsider will mix into our affairs. At the proper time I will ask the aunt of this girl you are going to marry to let me search Buena Vista for some valuable papers which my brother and sister must have put away in some hidden corner; as it has been more than three years since the children disappeared, it would be well to know the terms of the will which must surely exist. And then I will pretend to have found the will which Cristeta will write, annulling the unfair will of my father."

And thus, planning this and other wickedness, they passed the time very pleasantly during their ride to the City of the Acacias.

XI

THE RECEPTION

THE Countess and Rufino were much surprised not to see a line of carriages or other signs of invited guests at the gates of Buena Vista. But, far

from causing them anxiety, it rather pleased them; for it enabled Heliodoro to be the first to offer his hand to the young heiress.

Arrived at last in the grand salon, they were met by the charming Fairy of the Woods—who they thought, of course, was the wealthy widow. She ordered a servant to request her niece to come to the salon at once.

Marita did not keep them waiting.

In the three years which had passed, the girl had changed a great deal, and now, being large for her age, she was a beautiful young woman, and none of the three from Movel recognized her.

Heliodoro exchanged hopeful glances with his parents; but their hope was shortlived, for the Fairy's friendly smile changed to a deep frown as she turned to Rufino and suddenly cried:

"Cain, what have you done with your brother?"

Rufino turned pale and began to tremble. And his agitation was increased when a door opened and there before their astonished eyes stood Armando, Elisa, and Pablo, whom they at once recognized. Pablo ran across the room to stand beside his cousin.

"Marita," he exclaimed, "we shall never be separated again!"

Rufino and the Countess and Heliodoro were terrified, without at all understanding what had happened. Their first thought was flight; but the Fairy of the Woods, extending her wand, made them immovable.

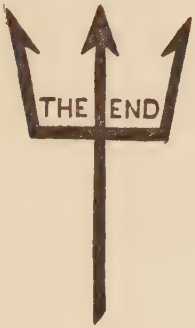
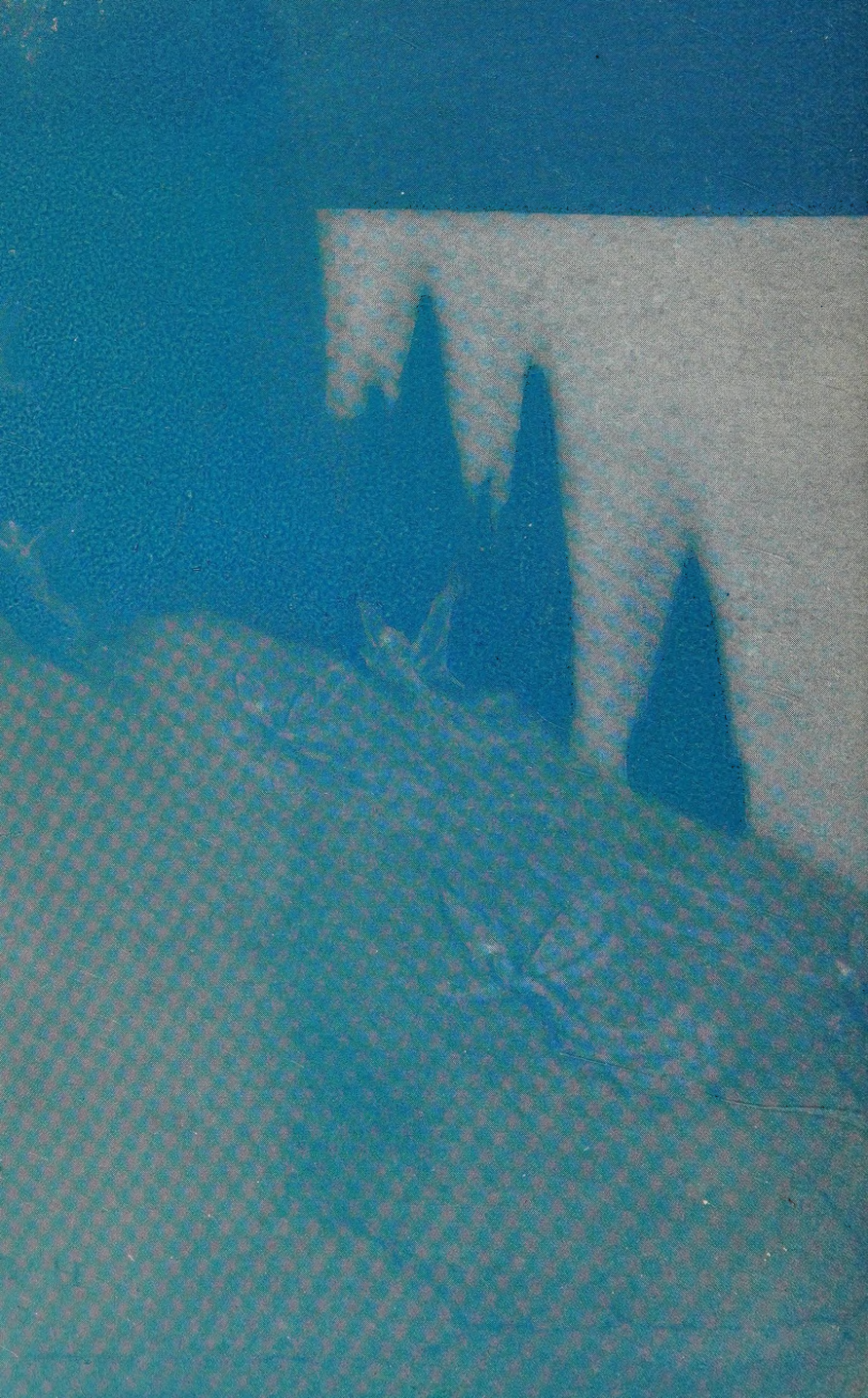
And at that moment there came to them a strange and terrific noise, like a distant and frightful earthquake.

"Where are you going?" the Fairy asked. "Do you think you can escape the punishment which you deserve for all your infamies? The noise that you heard was the last thunderings of an earthquake which has just destroyed your castle. Already the sea has swallowed up its ruins and the riches which you treasured there. But that it not enough! I shall change you into loathsome toads, and you shall live in the lake in these gardens, so that your punishment may be the greater when you contemplate the happiness of your relatives. And I make you immortals, so that envy may not kill you and your punishment may be eternal."

Armando and Elisa, being so generous, fell at the Fairy's feet and begged mercy for their unfortunate brother and his family; but the Fairy refused to listen to their pleas. She touched Rufino and the Countess and Heliodoro with her wand, and instantly they were transformed into horrid toads, which hopped out into the garden and plunged into the waters of the lake.

The Fairy then extended her wand toward them, and spoke to Armando and Elisa and the two children.

"So that you may not be made sorrowful," she said, "by seeing the misery of these toads as they

hop about your garden, I make them invisible to you."

A few days afterward, when happiness reigned again at Buena Vista, the Fairy of the Woods was called away on an urgent matter; and the Faun, bidding his friends good-by, once more withdrew into the depths of his forest.